FROM VIRAL HASHTAG TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT:

THE RHETORIC AND REALIZATION OF #METOO

by

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(Under the Direction of Belinda Stillion Southard)

ABSTRACT

On October 15, 2017, the #MeToo hashtag went viral and started a social movement to end gender-based violence, primarily in the workplace. This thesis highlights three pivotal flashpoints in the first year of #MeToo in order to explain the different rhetorical maneuvers used by social movements that emerge and sustain a primarily online movement. Each chapter surveys theories of online activism and movements and then explores their potential and limits through the #MeToo case study.

INDEX WORDS: sm2.0, web 2.0, internet activism, hashtag activism, feminism,

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For my mom,

who taught me the squeaky wheel gets the *grease*

but that Norma Rae almost got run off the road.

Twenty-five years, and my life is still

Trying to get up that great big hill of hope

For a destination.

What's Up? – 4 Non Blondes

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By 2011 the internet[1] had become an important tool for activism worldwide. The Occupy Wallstreet movement (2011),[2] the Arab Spring (2010/2011),[3] and the *Indignadas* [Outraged] in Spain (2011)[4] are just a few of the social movements around the world that have used the internet for message dissemination and protestor mobilization. For these protests, the internet and web 2.0[5] services were used as tools to supplement and/or enhance the already existing offline demonstrations. In the years following the online activists began to utilize the hashtag—signified by a pound symbol and a thematic phrase or word—as the primary place for organizing support, disseminating messages, and interacting with fellow activists and critics alike. "Hashtag activism"[6] as it is called, is exemplified by popular protests such as #BlackLivesMatter,[7] whose mission is to "build local power and to intervene in violence inflected on Black communities by the state vigilantes." In the case in this project, #MeToo, which began as a response to the reports of sexual abuse by powerful Hollywood film distributor Harvey Weinstein, served as a place to discuss workplace safety and gender-based violence.[8] The shift from the internet as a tool to the internet as the primary scene of address for activists raises the question that is at the heart of this thesis: *How do people collaborate in an online public to emerge, establish, and sustain an online social movement—a movement that uses the internet as its primary mode of disseminating information, connecting individuals, and arranging symbols?*

Web 2.0 services afford dissenters with inexpensive and swift mass communication for contacting, mobilizing, recruiting, and disseminating messages. Such internet-born and sustained movements have encountered criticism from scholars who frequently write-off their activism as "slacktivism" or "clicktivism." Slacktivism is broadly characterized as a quasi-activism, which requires little time or involvement, offers a hint of the feeling of serving others, and at best, has minimal material or symbolic effects on the political or social cause it aims to support.[9] For example, signing a petition on Change.org or retweeting a post to "raise awareness" would be considered popular forms of slacktivism. Evgeny Morozov, internet scholar, unpacks how to understand slacktivism:

> A good way to tell whether a digital campaign is serious or 'slacktivist' is to look at what it aspires to achieve. Campaigns of the latter kind seem to be premised on the assumption that, given enough tweets, the world's problems are solvable…Not surprisingly, many of these Facebook groups find themselves in a 'waiting for Godot' predicament: Now that the group has been formed, what comes next?[10]

This critique is not without merit and is exemplary of the larger debate between techno-utopians and techno-dystopian internet scholars. Taking place on two sides of the same deterministic coin, techno-utopian scholars like Barry Hangue and Brian Loader claim that the expansion of information available to citizens and the exchange of ideas that is now possible will enhance political participation, civil society, and democracy.[11] On the other side of the coin, techno-dystopian scholars like Benjamin Barber view the internet as a weapon of manipulation wielded by governments and corporations to legitimize their

own identities. Similarly, dystopian scholars, like Donald Gustein and Anthony Wilhelm, warn of the demeaning political discourse that takes place on the internet as a threat to democracy.[12]

Rhetorical analyses of online social movements are a necessary component of the contemporary study of social movements. The emphasis on determinism that internet scholars tend to put on the internet's effects can overlook the agents behind the keyboards and reduce the successes and failures of a movement to the existence of the network on which they formed. Rather than view social movements through this lens, a rhetorical analysis ventures to look at the social movement holistically. Rhetorical scholar Charles Morris sums up the rhetorical qualities of social protests, writing,

> Some movements fail; others prosper: but whatever their resources and strategies, whatever their aims and effects, movements are by their nature rhetorical. Why? Because…they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal.[13]

That is to say, to read social movements online as rhetorical, one must look outside the power of the internet as medium for change (their resources, their strategies). This is especially important for online movements because they can follow a path to formation and success that is marked by dissimilar landmarks compared to historical (offline) movements. Techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci illustrates these differences:

> The civil rights movement may have reached a peak in the March on Washington in 1963, but the Occupy movement arguably *began* with the occupation of Zuccotti Park in 2011. The future trajectory or potential impacts of networked

> movements cannot be fully understood by using only conceptual models, indicators and benchmarks…[14]

Because contemporary online movements don't necessarily follow historic patterns, understanding how online movements emerge, establish, and sustain themselves rhetorically is necessary. That is to say, online movement are a productive new avenue to examine for rhetorical movement studies as they are different in their networked nature than movements previously examined.

This project offers a rhetorical analysis of #MeToo, an online movement that originated on Twitter, in an effort to answer the overall question: *How do people collaborate in an online public to emerge, establish, and sustain a social movement online?*

To answer this overarching question, I join the handful of scholars who have begun to examine how social media platforms enable and constrain social change as a process both online and offline. I will conduct three major analyses of the viral hashtag-campaign-turned-movement known as #MeToo. In order to draw conclusions about how campaigns and movements, which are established and sustained online, negotiate their rhetorical identity and build and galvanize as a cohesive movement, I will look at three important moments, or flashpoints, that exemplify important rhetorical maneuvers that advanced and shaped #MeToo member identity and political goals.

#MeToo: A Case Study

In a single tweet published by a Hollywood actor a social movement began, or so the story is told. It should be noted at the outset that this thesis aims to study the #MeToo movement, not the "Me Too" movement. A pound sign (hashtag) is how I will delineate

between the movement that began on Twitter with the initial call to action tweet by Alyssa Milano and the movement that began by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, which has the similar goal of helping at-risk young girls of color who have experience sexual abuse and trauma.[15] This is not to say that the two movement's do not overlap, converge, or even mirror each other. Rather, this is my attempt to mark the difference between a movement that emerged and sustained primarily offline (Burke's "Me, too" circa 2006) and a movement that emerged and sustained primarily via online activism (via Milano's #MeToo tweet). There are other key differences between the movements regarding the goals of each movement, however, for the sake of brevity, I simply restate my acknowledgement of Burke's important work within the grander scheme of the movement but reinforce this marked boundary between the two movements. It is because the two movements share a name, and because Burke earns the original credit for the name, that #MeToo does its politics through the Time's Up organization. Further clarity will come with a greater contextual understanding and so from here I digress back to the beginning of #MeToo.

On October 5, 2017, actor Ashley Judd and other women who worked for film distributor and production juggernaut Harvey Weinstein were named in a *New York Times* report that detailed how Weinstein paid off sexual harassment accusers for decades.[16] Weinstein promptly released an apology,[17] but three days later was fired from the board of his production company (Weinstein Company).[18] Two days after Weinstein's firing, on October 10, 2017, Ronan Farrow published an investigative report in the *New Yorker* that named 13 more women who accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct ranging from "aggressive overtures to sexual assault."[19] These reports sparked almost immediate

responses from celebrities on social media including actor Terry Crews, who spoke about his own experience with sexual assault in the Hollywood industry,[20] actress Brie Larson, who wrote a tweet commending the women who shared their stories,[21] and Meryl Streep and George Clooney, who called Weinstein's behavior "disgraceful"[22] and "indefensible,"[23] respectively.

In the wake of the investigative reports, and the public discussion taking place mainly on Twitter, actor and longtime activist Alyssa Milano tweeted a screenshot of a note that read: "Me too. Suggested by a friend: 'If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.'"[24] The text of the tweet read, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."[25] In less than 24 hours the reply turned into the viral hashtag #MeToo and over a the course of a month accrued over 1.7 million tweets and reached 85 countries, all of which have at least 1,000 mentions of #MeToo.[26] In the weeks following the viral #MeToo tweet, an increasing number of public figures faced accusations of sexual assault and either resigned from their positions or risked being removed.[27] Over a year later and the #MeToo hashtag has reached multiple social media platforms, worldwide saturation, and is still mentioned frequently in news when

Figure 1 Actor, activist, and founder of #MeToo, Alyssa Milano tweets a call to action to the world in the wake of the Weinstein news. Retrieved July 2019.

discussing issues related to sexual misconduct, workplace equality, and gender-based equality.

The first step to answering the overall question of how people collaborate in an online public in order to emerge, establish, and sustain as a social movement is to understand scholarly conversations about social movement rhetoric and the online and offline public spheres. The following review of literature on social movement rhetorics and publics will highlight the trends in social movement and online social movement rhetorics and feminist protest rhetorics. Then, I will move to a discussion about publics and counterpublics as well as put forth the current theory of networked publics in an effort to understand how publics function online. This move to a discussion of publics online will elucidate what factors enable and constrain communication online and give a clear understanding to how individuals become interconnected as part of a public through engagement with a hashtag.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The delineation between online *campaigns* and online social *movements* is important for the rhetorical study of social movements because to conflate the two is to blur the goals of each. An internet campaign, for the purposes of this project, will be thought of as synonymous with slacktivism:[28] it is a (usually) viral single-issue cause, possibly a hashtag, with the main priority to spread awareness of an issue.[29] The primary goal of a campaign is to inform, and it is through this process of informing that those promoting the campaign are considered to be performing their activism.[30] Campaigns are different than—not better or worse—social movements, which are more action-oriented in nature. In 1952, Leland Griffin did not make the distinction between campaigns and

movements—and did not need to make such a distinction since internet and mainstream activism were decades away. Rather, Griffin advocated for students studying historical movements to "…discover, in the wide sense of the word, the rhetorical patterns inherent in the movement selected for investigation."[31] Twenty years later, Herbert W. Simons, provided a leader-centered conception of persuasion in social movements, arguing: "the rhetoric of social movements must *follow*, in a general way, from the very nature of movements."[32] Simons explicitly defined social movements as "an uninstitutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to implement a program for the reconstitution of social norms or values."[33] He distinguished social movements from panics and crazes and from actions of recognized labor unions and other organized decision-making bodies. In a digital activism age, this definition also works to distinguish movements from campaigns since campaigns do not mobilize for action to implement a program. It is clear from these definitions that the primary goal of a campaign is to inform, and the primary goal of a social movement is to persuade, but how do social movements persuade an audience?

Movement studies initially conceptualized protest rhetoric as a justice-centered public activity. Scholars placed the exigency for change with tactics such as public protests at the center of the discourse.[34] The goal of movements was social progress, which was expressed as an appeal to justice.[35] In the twentieth century, social protests were defined by their radicalism, revolution, and counter-culture lifestyles and confrontation was considered one of the prevailing tactics of protests rhetoric.[36] Confrontation was defined by Robert Cathcart as "that form of human behavior labeled 'agonistics,' i.e. pertaining to ritual conflicts. Confrontation is symbolic display acted out when one is in the throes of agon."[37] Regardless of the tactic, the performative aspect of

activism was important. J.M. Gray argued that the performance of spectacle is an important aspect of struggle, appropriation, and social activism.[38]

Into and through the twenty-first century, new tactics for protest rhetoric were noted as a more mediated form of politics became the norm. Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar argued that the contemporary exigences women faced called for activism, especially for feminists, that focused heavily on private sphere exigences and protests.[39] So-called private sphere activism, Sowards and Renegar noted, used tactics such as leadership as activism (mentorships), humor and pranking, building a feminist self-identity, and sharing stories and writing as their means of participating in a social movement.[40] This shift in protest tactics was not exclusive to women and feminists. Christine Harold specifically explored the practice of "culture jamming" where "pranksters" deployed the tools of mass media and marketing to take advantage of the resources and venues they afford.[41] Harold argued that mass mediated pranks repattern traditional notions of rhetoric because media pranksters undermine the proprietary authority of rhetoric by hijacking its sanctioned venues.[42] Further, Heidi Huntington analyzed the Occupy Wall Street internet meme "The Pepper Spray Cop" as a piece of visual political rhetoric to highlight the intertextual nature of memes as a unique form of visual rhetoric.[43]

This shift in the mediated nature of activism around the 21st century aligns with the pervasion of networked technology and the subsequent shift in the conceptualization of publics and counterpublics. In the following section I will explore theories of publics and counterpublics in order to contextualize how individuals interact, come together, and

create collective discourses—one of the most important factors in building a social movement.

PUBLICS AND COUNTERPUBLICS

The definition of publics, and the introduction of counterpublics, have been richly deliberated. The conceptualization of publics can be traced back to Jürgen Habermas's fundamental work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,[44] which defined the bourgeois public sphere as,

> a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is granted to all citizens.…Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion—that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions—about matters of general interest.[45]

In the years since *The Structural Transformation*, many scholars criticized Habermas's bourgeois public sphere for excluding women,[46] despite women's noted contributions to politics.[47] With scholarly interest in the concept of publics piqued, the ongoing deliberation over its definition became a site of contestation—the most relevant of which will be expounded in the ensuing section. The many meanings of "public" and therefore "counterpublic" can problematize questions about the explanation of such a group. Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer aptly sum up the many different definitions of public, stating,

> Public…may indicate something potentially open to all (as in the bourgeois public sphere), potentially concerning all (as in matters of public interest), potentially known to all (as in public information), potentially constituted by all (as in the

general public), and potential movement toward all (as in attempts to publicize matters).[48]

Adding the prefix "counter" only adds to varied set of conceptual understandings.

Counterpublics are specifically important to understand how marginalized individuals cohere, build a group identity, and enact social change. In the book *Counterpublics and the State*, Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer argued that a shift *from* a tension between the public and the state (as John Dewey emphasized)[49] *to* a tension between *counter*publics and the state marked counterpublics as the new place of social transformation.[50] Gerard Hauser described the rhetorical identity of a counterpublic as that of an arena for hearing proscribed voices, expressing proscribed ideas, and entertaining the alternative reality they advance to the existing order.[51] As a pivotal discursive arena for the deliberation of common realities regarding the hegemonic public rule, counterpublics serve as a place of meaning-making prior to the group coalescing as a social movement when they move to confront the state or governing decision-making body.[52] Moreover, counterpublics as temporal, discursive, and even physical spaces aid in the definition of identity, which is also central for social movements.[53]

Rita Felski developed a theorization of the feminist public sphere for the analysis of "diverse forms of recent artistic and cultural activity by women in relation to the historical emergence of an influential oppositional ideology which seeks to challenge the existing reality of gender subordination."[54] The termed "feminist public sphere" diverges from Habermas' bourgeois public sphere in that the feminist public sphere does not claim a representative universality.[55] Rather, the feminist public sphere offers a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of *women as a marginalized group within society*.[56] It

is in this sense that the feminist public sphere constitutes a "partial or counter-public sphere." Felski describes this partial or counter-public sphere as "in the case of other oppositional communities defined in terms of racial or ethnic identity or sexual preference, the experience of discrimination, oppression, and cultural dislocation provides the impetus for the development of a self-consciously oppositional identity."[57]

Nancy Fraser similarly posits her own conceptualization of counterpublics through a feminist lens in response to Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere. In her essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," Fraser theorized what she called subaltern counterpublics.[58] Fraser argued that Habermas's assumptions did not acknowledge that marginalized public groups may have barriers that keep them from freely deliberating.[59] To create a more inclusive model of publics Fraser proposes a model of subaltern counterpublics. These counterpublics are theorized as parallel discursive arenas wherein members of subordinate social groups circulate counter-discourse that in turn permits them to formulate identities, interests, and oppositional interpretations as needed.[60]

Michael Warner put forth a rhetorical definition of publics. Warner defined publics as self-organizing social spaces that are created by the reflexive circulation of discourse among strangers.[61] Within these social spaces, the public discourse is always personal and impersonal; meaning discourses are addressed to "the stranger we are until the moment we happen to be addressed by it."[62] Warner theorized that a public is made up of people who are constituted by mere attention to the address and will act in the temporality of the circulation that gives its existence.[63] Accordingly, the success of a

public depends on continued attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding that the address articulates.[64]

Similar to publics in form, counterpublics have been theorized by many scholars who sought to understand their function and membership. Warner elaborates on publics by offering a rhetorical conceptualization of counterpublics that is dissimilar to Fraser's. Warner argues that counterpublics are "far more" than an expression of subaltern culture.[65] Counterpublics are fundamentally mediated by public forms and therefore incorporate the (im)personal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as the condition for their common world.[66] Counterpublic discourse also addresses those strangers as being not just anyone but marked by their participation in this kind of discourse.[67] Such counterpublics are, at some level, conscious or not, aware of their subordinate status. They are aware that "ordinary people" would not want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk.[68]

The internet and networked communication technologies changed the communication environment and subsequently altered how (counter)publics function. Joshua Meyrowitz argued that broadcasting technology (television, radio) changed social environments and influenced people and their behavior.[69] These changes in social environments consequently enabled and constrained interaction in new ways. Internet scholar danah boyd conceptualized "networked publics" as publics that have been restructured by networked technologies such that they are simultaneously the space constructed through networked technologies and the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.[70] Networked publics altered the roles that people played in society, complicated boundaries between public

and private, collapsed distinct social contexts, and ruptured the salience of physical place in circumscribing publics.[71] Controlling or managing networked publics is difficult as boyd theorizes. First, an invisible audience means that individuals in networked publics usually rely on an imagined audience to assess appropriate topics and responses.[72] Second, without social, spatial, and temporal boundaries, collapsed contexts make it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts.[73] Finally, without control over the context the public and private become meaningless binaries that are scaled in new ways and are difficult to maintain as distinct.[74] Understanding these intricacies is an important step to analyzing how individuals interact on the network to emerge and endure as a social movement.

The architecture of networked publics provides a place for individuals to leverage affordances for the advancement of their social causes. Dennis Leung and Francis Lee argued that "alternative media" can help cultivate counterpublics.[75] Alternative media, Leung and Less conceptualize, are sites where people who share similar political orientations articulate their responses to concrete matters or new issues; this includes social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.[76] These alternative media sites not only give expression to already existing voices of the marginalized but are often the sites where such voices can be articulated in the first place.[77] Manuel Castells highlighted the importance of the internet in many grassroots activist campaigns of the 2000's in his book *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.[78] Castells argued that networks of resistance contribute to counterpower, which "challenges the power embedded in the institutions of society for the purpose of claiming representation for their own values and interests."[79]

Feminist activists have leveraged the affordances of the internet in order to advance a political agenda in a mediated environment. Digital feminist activists commonly engage in what has been called "hashtag feminism" or "hashtag activism" as a way to bridge the gap between online and offline experiences. Examples of hashtag activism include the creation of campaigns like #EverydaySexism, which is a place for women to raise awareness via tweets about typical daily microaggressions.[80] Digital platforms allow feminists to reach more individuals beyond their locality[81] and they help facilitate open engagement with and promotion of feminism.[82] However, these platforms are not *only* positive places for activists. Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher note that women are frequently attacked online by trolls and even receive rape and death threats.[83] Critics of social media activism also question the possibility of the mob-mentality. Petra Boynton explained the dangers of such mentality: "[t]he mobilizing power social media creates also enables mobbing, bullying and harassment."[84]

This project is dedicated to further understanding digital feminists' activism. Specifically, how digital feminists leverage or exploit the ways in which online activism helps build, coalesce, and sustain social movements. The following chapter preview lays out the research questions, methods, and case studies (moments in the progress of #MeToo) that will aid us in this understanding.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In accordance with the overall aim to understand how people collaborate in an online public in order to emerge and establish a social movement I will focus on the #MeToo movement as the case study. Each chapter will focus on a specific flashpoint in the #MeToo campaign/movement to understand the emergence, establishment, and

persistence of the movement as such. Thus, the following is divided into three distinct moments in the #MeToo movement; each chapter will utilize a case specific archive and a reading strategy that will help answer a specific question in regards to the emergence and sustainability of a social movement that exists primarily online.

CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY, IN 280 CHARACTERS OR LESS

The #MeToo campaign gained popularity and national importance when women and men used the thread to publicize their experience(s) of sexual misconduct. In the first few weeks of #MeToo's virality, the campaign was frequently referred to simply as a "hashtag." Popular usage of hashtags is credited to a Twitter user in 2007, who one day proposed, "how do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?"[85] This original intention of the hashtag is probably the best classification of #MeToo its first months: a group. Or, more specifically, an online counterpublic. Thus, the question of this chapter is not *if* #MeToo is a counterpublic, but rather, *how is a digital counterpublic identity formed?*

To answer this question, I analyze one major flashpoint in #MeToo's history whereupon emergent leaders drew a boundary as to who could and could not belong to the counterpublic. These leaders declared that individuals with a history of sexually explicit or predatory behavior were not welcome in the digital counterpublic. This flashpoint was set off on January 7, 2018 when actor and filmmaker James Franco appeared at the 75th annual Golden Globes event wearing a lapel pin that proclaimed support for those who experience sexual misconduct. In real time, multiple women (former students, co-stars, and actors Franco directed) live-tweeted their reaction to Franco's support. The women highlighted the hypocrisy of Franco's so-called support

based on his past reported behavior and accused him of new sexually exploitative behavior. Over the preceding month, Franco responded to the allegations, the *L.A. Times* investigation, and multiple celebrities commented on the allegations including actor and #MeToo figurehead Scarlet Johannsson.

This chapter aims to explain how digital counterpublics define their identity through what I call "threads of confrontation" that crowdsource elites. Such digital counterpublics, which are different from non-mediated counterpublics, challenge the notions of a stable context, rhetor, and exigence of the rhetorical situation. For any progressive campaign, confrontation is a key rhetorical maneuver for exposing what is flawed with the present. By following the moments of confrontation during this singular flashpoint from Twitter, to cable television, to newsprint, and finally to a speech at the 2018 Women's March, I was able to glean two things. One, the thread of confrontation works to crowdsource elites, which is typical of online leadership models, however it also modifies ethos in a digital counterpublic to include the quantitative magnitude of an individual's impact (reach). Second, through the thread of confrontation, #MeToo set a boundary for continued participation and belonging in the counterpublic, and consequently defined a facet of their group identity. That is to say, by defining #MeToo as exactly *not* people like James Franco with a history of predatory or manipulative behavior, then #MeToo participants are *only* those who do not act in a predatory fashion (both past and present behavior included).

Simultaneous to this moment, another equally important flashpoint occurred. As threads of confrontation helped form pieces of the #MeToo digital counterpublic identity, the open letters published at the launch of the Time's Up organization worked to cohere

and motivate the digital counterpublic into a social movement. It is important to note that this coherence and motivation did not happen immediately with the publication of the letters nor did the formation of the organization. In fact, the interconnected and intertwined timelines of chapter two and three exemplifies the time it takes to have meaningful and methodical deliberations over such a disparate medium with such diverse participatory pool. Furthermore, it shows that the vast internet environment allows for multiple channels of communication (threads) to occur simultaneously within a single group. Chapter three features the transition from #MeToo as a counterpublic to #MeToo as a political and social movement by analyzing how the open letters, exchanged between a farmworker's union and the women of Hollywood, worked to constitute #MeToo as a social movement.

CHAPTER THREE: GOFUNDME A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Approximately one month after the Milano #MeToo tweet, the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (National Farmworker Women's Alliance) published an open letter in *Time Magazine* at the lead up to "The Take Back the Workplace" march in Los Angeles. In the letter, the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, a union of 700,000 women who work in the agricultural fields and packaging sheds across the United States, acknowledge the women of Hollywood's experiences of pervasive sexual assault in the workplace. The Alianza wrote that they too experienced gender-based violence at the hands of bosses, co-workers, and other powerful individuals within the industry. This letter, which opened with "Dear Sisters" and closed with "In solidarity," functioned as the catalyst for the Time's Up organization and repositioned #MeToo as a social movement.

On January 1, 2018, an open letter published in the *New York Times* and Spanish-language *La Opinion* in support by nearly 300 female, film industry, #MeToo leaders and supporters announced the Time's Up organization.[86] Comprised of Time's Up Now, a social welfare 501(c)(4), and the Time's Up Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity, the organization capitalized off the #MeToo digital counterpublic's publicity and activists in order to advocate for social and political change.[87] The open letter that announced the Time's Up organization, signed originally by 300 Hollywood industry women, began with "Dear Sisters," and closed with "In solidarity" just as the Alianza's letter.[88]

The Time's Up open letter both acknowledged the privilege that the women of Hollywood have due to their socioeconomic status and their celebrity platform and served as one of the first official documents setting forth demands of the movement. Time's Up called for specific actions.[89] First, a legal defense fund of $13 million was seeded by the original signatories of the letter to help less privileged women legally protect themselves from sexual misconduct and the fallout from reporting it. The legal defense fund, in conjunction with the National Women's Law Center, was subsequently published on Go Fund Me, a popular crowdfunding website, and supporters were encouraged to donate to the fund as a way of "signing" the letter in support. Second, they advocated for legislation to penalize companies that tolerate persistent harassment and to discourage the use of nondisclosure agreements to silence "victims."[90] Third, they called for a drive to reach gender parity at studios and talent agencies (the group 50/50by2020 had already begun this work). Finally, Time's up invited women walking the red carpet at the 75th annual Golden Globes speak out and raise awareness and protest gender violence by wearing black.

Through this flashpoint I explain how a digital counterpublic, marked by a hashtag, established a social movement online. This chapter asks: *how does a digital counterpublic become a social movement?* To answer this question, I execute a close textual analysis of the open letters exchanged by the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas and the response letter by the women of Hollywood. The analysis of these letters will elucidate the persuasive appeals #MeToo made in an effort to cohere the digital counterpublic and seek political and social change. I argue that the letters served as a constitutive rhetoric, as theorized by Maurice Charland, that constituted #MeToo as a social movement.

The Time's Up organization rebranded the #MeToo digital counterpublic as #TimesUp: a movement devoted to the social, political, and economic advancement of women in the workplace. In order to make the shift from #MeToo, a consummatory digital counterpublic with no explicit persuasive purpose beyond claiming belonging, to a social movement, Time's Up first had to remake the audience from objects acted-upon by predatory men to subjects capable-of-action. To remake the audience from objects to subjects, the Time's Up letters defined a sisterhood that made all women consubstantial based on a like experience. Simultaneously, the letters hailed a feminist ideology, which provided a common context within which subjects could act. Finally, the letters situated the subjects and their motives in a future utopian narrative that provided women a narrative as no longer acted-upon but as actors in their own right.

Although this move did not happen overnight, the participants of #TimesUp and #MeToo eventually began to work cohesively to move against the pubic and state in an effort to create lasting change in the laws and culture of the workplace. This work was

jeopardized almost nine months after the launch of the Time's Up organization when a pivotal #MeToo figurehead, Asia Argento, one of the first women to publicly accuse Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault in the *New Yorker*, was accused of sexual misconduct by actor and musician Jimmy Bennett who was a minor at the time of the incident. This particular moment in #MeToo's development is an insightful case study to understand how a social movement discursively negotiates a crisis of their collective identity. Before this moment, #MeToo had set multiple boundaries and declared that they were a movement *for* victims and exactly *not for* perpetrators. Now, #MeToo must contend with the fallout when a lead victim is outed as exactly *not* what #MeToo claims to be (a perpetrator of sexual misconduct).

CHAPTER FOUR: DR. VICTIM AND MS. PERPETRATOR

On August 18, 2018, almost a year into the #MeToo movement, the *New York Times* reported that Asia Argento, one of the first women to openly accuse Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault, had been paying off a settlement with he own accuser.[91] Actor and musician Jimmy Bennett reportedly received a $380,000 settlement after Argento sexually assaulted him years earlier in a California hotel room, just two months after his 17th birthday.[92] She was 37-years-old. In this moment Asia Argento, an outspoken #MeToo advocate who had positioned herself as the perfect victim of the movement, was publicly accused of sexual assault. This accusation called into question all of Argento's previous statements and by proxy all the work of #MeToo. Many #MeToo participants began to ask, "If a victim can be a perpetrator, who are we fighting for?"

Social movements on social networking sites face different obstacles and constraints than traditional offline movements, especially the ability to sustain political momentum and relevancy when met with constantly overturning news cycles and abstract asynchronous places that activists gather. Without the ability to sustain and reorient social movements online, the effects of any political or social change would be relegated to the digital sphere and rarely influence the offline public. In this third moment of the #MeToo movement, I undertake the question of sustainability. To this point, #MeToo appears to be a typical and idyllic movement that follows a linear line of progression from hashtag, to digital counterpublic, to social movement, and (seemingly) to a utopian resolve. However, that is not the case. The third important flashpoint for the movement is a moment of crisis and possible failure for the movement. The responses (tweet threads, opinion articles) by fellow #MeToo figureheads to the Argento crisis are analyzed to answer the question, *how does an online social movement sustain when threatened with a crisis to their collective identity?*

I argue that in order to maintain the legitimacy of the movement, other figureheads co-opted the criticisms against Argento into support that proved the movement had public-wide need. By constructing the accusation against Argento as distinct from her accusation against Weinstein, #MeToo attempted to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and demonstrate how sexual assault is pervasive and complex. This chapter will analyze Asia Argento's public ethos as the "perfect victim" through a feminist perspective. I perform a close-text analysis of Argento's initial interview with *The New Yorker* in which she accuses Weinstein of sexual assault, the report against Argento by Jimmy Bennet in the *New York Times* in which he accuses Argento of sexual

assault, and the subsequent published opinions by fellow #MeToo figureheads and commentators.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

The thesis ends with conclusions drawn out from each previous chapter. This meta-analysis of the chapters summarizes the key contributions of each case study and helps us answer broader questions about digital activism and online counterpublics. For instance, we discuss the utility of online social movements, what lessons digital feminist and social movement activists can learn from these case studies, and what rhetorical studies scholars can more learn about rhetoric in general.

ENDNOTES

[1] The capitalization of the word internet was a contentious topic in the early aughts. In 2002 Joseph Turrow began a personal crusade to de-capitalize the word "internet" and thus by extension, shift the way we think about the online world. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Turrow stated, "'The capitalization of things seems to place an inordinate, almost private emphasis on something. The Internet, at least philosophically, should not be owned by anyone." Turrow called the internet "part of the neural universe of life." The Times went on to paraphrase Turrow, writing, "But, he said, dropping the big I would sent [sic] a deeper message to the world: The revolution is over, and the Net won. It's part of everyone's life, and as common as air and water (neither of which starts with a capital)." In the years proceeding Turrow's book the capitalization of "internet" has seemingly all but disappeared due to AP and Chicago style guides calling for the de-capitalization of "internet" in the mid 2000's. Still, some people capitalize the word "internet" for various (and passionate) reasons.

As the kids say: TLDR; in this house we do not capitalize "internet."

See, Dante D'Orazio, "The Associated Press Style Guide Will No Longer Capitalize 'Internet,'" The Verge, April 2, 2016, https://www.theverge.com/2016/4/2/11352744/ap-style-guide-will-no-longer-capitalize-internet.; John Schwartz, "The Nation: Case-Sensitive Crusader; Who

Owns the Internet? You and i Do," *The New York Times*, December 29, 2002, sec. Week in Review, https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/29/weekinreview/the-nation-case-sensitive-crusader-who-owns-the-internet-you-and-i-do.html.; "7.80: Terms like 'Web' and 'Internet,'" in *The Chicago Manual of Style Online*.

[2] See, Jeffrey S. Juris, "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation," *American Ethnologist* 39, vol. 2 (2012): 259-279.

[3] See, Amy Mitchell, Heather Brown, and Emily Guskin, "The Role of Social Media in the Arab Upsrising," *Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media*, November 28, 2012, http://www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/.

[4] See, Castells, Manuel, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012. See esp. chap. 5, "A Rhizomatic Revolution: *Indignadas* in Spain."

[5] Web 2.0 refers a new iteration of the web, not an update. Web 2.0 is a term used to denote the shift to an Internet experience that emphasizes user generated content, usability by non-experts, and interoperability for everyday users. For this matter, Web 2.0 is used as a shorthand to refer to platforms such as, but not limited to, social networking, blogs, wikis, apps, listservs, and video sharing services.

[6] The phrase "hashtag activism" is generally used in a denigrative way (similar to "slacktivism"), I use quotations here to mark that the usage of hashtag activism only as descriptive and not critical of its outcomes or usefulness.

[7] Black Lives Matter, "About," *Black Lives Matter*. https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/

[8] Me Too Movement. "About," *Me Too Movement*. https://metoomvmt.org/about/

[9] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

[10] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, 190-1.

[11] Barry Hangue and Brian Loader *Digital Democracy*; Elaine C. Karmarck and Joseph Nye *Democracy.Com;* John Locke, *The de-voicing of society*.

[12] Benjamin Barber *Jihad vs. McWorld*; Donald Gustein *E.Con;* Anthony G. Wilhem, "Virtual Sounding Boards."

[13] Charles E. Morris III, "Theoretical Foundations," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* ed. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (State College: Strata Publishing): 1-2.

[14] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protests* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), xvi.

[15] Emma Brockes, "Me Too founder Tarana Burke: 'You have to use your privilege to serve other people.'" *The Guardian*, January 15, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/15/me-too-founder-tarana-burke-women-sexual-assault

[16] Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades," *New York Times*, October 5, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html.

[17] Harvey Weinstein, "Statement From Harvey Weinstein," *New York Times,* October 5, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/05/us/statement-from-harvey-weinstein.html.

[18] Megan Twohey, "Harvey Weinstein Is Fired After Sexual Harassment Reports," *New York Times*, October 8, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/business/harvey-weinstein-fired.html.

[19] Ronan Farrow, "From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories," *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories.

[20] Terry Crews, "This Whole Thing with Harvey Weinstein Is Giving Me PTSD. Why? Because This Kind of Thing Happened to ME. (1/Cont.)," Tweet, *@terrycrews* (blog), October 10, 2017, https://twitter.com/terrycrews/status/917838446697226240.

[21] Brie Larson, "As Always, I Stand with the Brave Survivors of Sexual Assault and Harassment. It's Not Your Fault. I Believe You.," Tweet, *@brielarson* (blog), October 5, 2017, https://twitter.com/brielarson/status/916072807313956864.

https://twitter.com/brielarson/status/916072807313956864.

[22] Yashar Ali, "EXCLUSIVE: Meryl Streep Speaks Out Against Harvey Weinstein," *Huffington Post*, October 9, 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/meryl-streep-harvey-weinstein_us_59db5d87e4b072637c45420e

[23] BBC, "Harvey Weinstein: George Clooney says alleged behaviour is 'defensible.'" *BBC*, October 10, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41567216

[24] Alyssa Milano, "If You've Been Sexually Harassed or Assaulted Write 'Me Too' as a Reply to This Tweet.Pic.Twitter.Com/K2oeCiUf9n," Tweet, *@Alyssa_Milano* (blog), October 15, 2017, https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Andrea Park, "#MeToo reaches 85 countries with 1.7m tweets," *CBS News*, December 6, 2017. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metoo-reaches-85-countries-with-1-7-million-tweets/

[27] The following timeline provides a detailed chronological list of accusations and resignations. See,

Staff and KT Hawbaker, "#MeToo: A timeline of events," *Chicago Tribune*, January 11, 2019, retrieved January 14, 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmlstory.html

For a more comprehensive list, see,

Riley Griffin, Hannah Recht and Jeff Green, "Me Too: One Year Later," *Bloomberg*, October 5, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-me-too-anniversary/.

[28] Slacktivism is used here as a purely descriptive adjective—not critical or denigrative as news media frequently employs the term.

[29] Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, 190-1.

[30] Caitlin Dewey, "#Bringbackourgirls, #Kony2012, and the complete, divisive history of 'hashtag activism,'" *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-

intersect/wp/2014/05/08/bringbackourgirls-kony2012-and-the-complete-divisive-history-of-hashtag-activism/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.45c48b1da3fd

[31] Leland M. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* ed. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 2001), 10.

[32] Herbert W. Simmons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* ed. Charles E. Morris III and Stephen H. Browne (State College: Strata Publishing): 35.

[33] Ibid., 35.

[34] Charles J. Stewart, "A Functional Approach to the Rhetoric of Social Movements," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 vol. 4 (1980): 300.; Stephen E. Lucas, "Coming to terms with movement studies," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 vol. 4 (1980): 265.

[35] James Darsey, "From 'gay is good' to the source of AIDS: The evolution of gay liberation rhetoric, 1977-1990" *Communication Studies,* 41 vol. 1 (1991): *52*.

[36] See, Theodore O. Windt, "The diatribe: Last resort for protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58, no. 1 (1972): 1-14.; Robert Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form" *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 43, no. 3 (1978): 233-47.; J.M. Gray, "Review essay: Striking social dramas, image events, and meme warfare: Performance and social activism-past, present, and future." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 21 (2001): 64-75.

[37] Robert Cathcart, "Movements," 235.

[38] J.M. Gray, "Review essay."

[39] Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar, "Reconceptualizing Rhetorical Activism in Contemporary Feminist Contexts," *Howard Journal of Communication*, 17 (2006): 57-74.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Christine Harold, "Pranking rhetoric: 'Culture jamming' as media activism," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 3 (2007): 189-211.

[42] Ibid., 207.

[43] Heidi E. Huntington, "Pepper Spray Cop and the American Dream: Using Synecdoche and Metaphor to Unlock Internet Memes' Visual Political Rhetoric," *Communication Studies* 67, no. 1 (2016): 77-93.

[44] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Category of Bourgeois Society,* trans. By Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

[45] Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* no. 3 (1964), 49.

[46] See, Marie Fleming, "Women and the 'Public Use of Reason,'" *Social Theory and Practice* 19, no. 1 (1993): 27-50.; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[47] See, Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[48] Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State*, 9.

[49] John Dewey, *The Public and It's Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

[50] Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, *Counterpublic and the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 2-3.

[51] Gerard A. Hauser, "Prisoners of Conscience and the Counterpublic Sphere of Prison Writing: The Stones that Start the Avalanche," in *Counterpublics and the State* ed. Robert Asen, Daniel C. Brouwer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 36.

[52] Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State*, 20.

[53] Catherine H. Palczewski, "Cyber movements, new social movements, and counterpublics," in *Counterpublics and the State* ed. by Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001): 165.

[54] Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 164.

[55] Ibid., 167. Emphasis mine.

[56] Ibid., 167.

[57] Ibid., 167.

[58] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

The term "subaltern," was taken from Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. by Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271-313. The term "counterpublic" was

taken from Felski's theorization in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetic: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). See esp. chap. 5 "Politics, Aesthetics, and the Feminist Public Sphere."

[59] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 71-3.

[60] Ibid., 67.

[61] Michael Warner, "Publics and counterpublics (abbreviated)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88, no. 4, 413-425.

[62] Ibid., 417-18.

[63] Ibid., 421.

[64] Ibid., 422.

[65] Ibid., 424.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., 423.

[68] Ibid., 424.

[69] Josh Meyrowitz, "The Blurring of Public and Private Behaviors," in *No Sense of Place* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985): 93-114.

[70] danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Networking Sites* ed. Zizi Papacharissi (Routledge: NY and London, 2011): 39.

[71] Ibid., 49.

[72] Ibid., 49-50.

[73] Ibid., 50-1.

[74] Ibid., 51-2.

[75] Dennis Leung and Francis Lee, "Cultivating an Active Online Counterpublic: Examining Usage and Political Impact of Internet Alternative Media," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 19, no. 3 (2014): 340-359.

[76] Ibid., 344.

[77] Ibid., 344.

[78] Manual Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Polity: Malden, M.A., 2012).

[79] Ibid., 5.

[80] Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher, "Tweeting back while shouting back: Social media and feminist activism." *Feminism & Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 129-130.

[81] J. Schuster, "Invisible feminists? Social media and young women's political participation," *Political Science* 65, (2013): 8-24.

[82] A. Crossley, "Facebook Feminism: Social Media, Blogs, and New Technologies of Contemporary U.S.," *Feminism Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 20, (2015): 253-268.

[83] Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher, "Tweeting back while shouting back," 129.

The Gamergate controversy (#Gamergate) is an excellent example of the trolls, threats, and danger of social media for women. See, Caitlin Dewey, "The only guide to Gamergae you will ever need to read," *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/?utm_term=.2940fb50f42c.

[84] Petra Boynton, "Getting the press we deserve: Opportunities and challenges for innovative media practice," *Feminism & Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2012), 539.

[85] Chris Messina, "How Do You Feel about Using # (Pound) for Groups. As in #barcamp [Msg]?," Tweet, @*chrismessina* (blog), August 23, 2007, https://twitter.com/chrismessina/status/223115412.; Jim Edwards, "The Inventor of the Twitter Hashtag Explains Why He Didn't Patent It," *Business Insider*, November 21, 2013. https://www.businessinsider.com/chris-messina-talks-about-inventing-the-hashtag-on-twitter-2013-11

[86] "Open Letter From Time's Up," *New York Times,* January 1, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/01/arts/02women-letter.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=6B559A28A2A1B63838E51B750758E0F5&gwt=pay.

[87] "About Time's Up," *Time's Up*, https://www.timesupnow.com/about_times_up.

[88] "Open Letter From Time's Up," *New York Times*.

[89] Cara Buckley, "Powerful Hollywood Women Unveil Anti-Harassment Action Plan," *New York Times*, January 1, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/movies/times-up-hollywood-women-sexual-harassment.html.

[90] I put quotations around the word "victims" as it is the terminology used by Cara Buckley from the *New York Times* and Time's Up. However, throughout this thesis I make the conscious effort not to use terms like "victim" or "survivor" unless the individual in question has claimed that term herself. Instead, I choose to use "people

first" language such as "a woman who experienced sexual harassment/assault/misconduct." As I will discuss in the following chapter, "victim" and "survivor" have many social and political entailments that I do not wish to place onto an individual arbitrarily.

[91] Kim Severson, "Asia Argento, a #MeToo Leader, Made a Deal With Her Own Accuser." *The New York Times*, August, 19, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/19/us/asia-argento-assault-jimmy-bennett.html

[92] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY, IN 280 CHARACTERS OR LESS: BOUNDARY NEGOTIATION AS IDENTITY FORMATION

Three months after the #MeToo tweet went viral, the Time's Up organization was formed by prominent #MeToo celebrities in conjunction with lawyer Roberta Kaplan and the National Women's Law Center. They aimed to raise awareness and push for social and political change regarding sexual misconduct[1] in the workplace.[2] As its first protest, Time's Up called all women attending the 75th annual Golden Globes Awards to wear black in solidarity with those who experienced sexual misconduct.[3] The night of the Globes, actor and filmmaker James Franco, like other supportive men that night, wore a pin of the Time's Up organization logo. Simulcast on television, Franco's support sparked near immediate controversy on Twitter when two women who interacted with Franco on movie sets or at his acting school accused him of sexual misconduct. Sarah Tither-Kaplan live-tweeted her reaction to Franco: "Hey James Franco, nice #timesup pin at the #GoldenGlobes, remember a few weeks ago when you told me the full nudity you had me do in two of your movies for $100/day wasn't

Figure 2 Sarah Tither-Kaplan, actor and filmmaker, calls out James Franco for exploitative behavior as he walks the Golden Globes red carpet wearing a Time's Up pin. Retrieved August 2019.

exploitative because I signed a contract to do it? Times up on that!"[4] Later that night, actor Violet Paley tweeted a similar call-out: "Cute #TIMESUP pin James Franco. Remember the time you pushed my head down in a car towards your exposed penis & that other time you told my friend to come to your hotel when she was 17? After you had already been caught doing that to a different 17 year old?"[5] The tweets garnered 9.1 and 28.4 thousand likes respectively[6] and quickly became a highlighted news story of the night.[7] Additionally, *Breakfast Club* actor and bona fide Brat Pack member Ally Sheedy tweeted-then-deleted a string of foreboding tweets about Franco, stating, "Why is a man hosting? Why is James Franco allowed in? […] James Franco just won. Please never ask me why I left the film/tv business."[8]

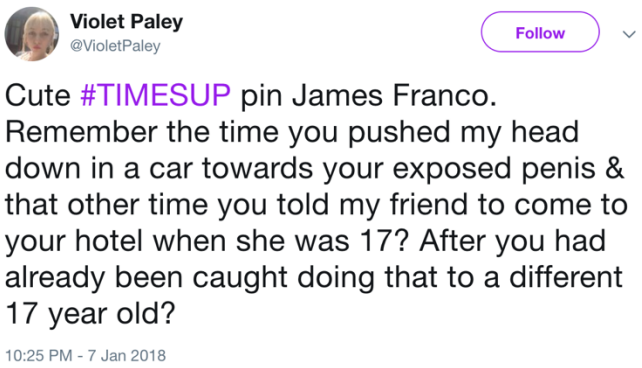

Figure 3 Violet Paley, actor, calls out James Franco's hypocrisy. Retrieved August 2019.

In response to the tweets, Franco appeared on the *Late Show with Stephen Colbert* the following Tuesday and stated: "I don't want to shut [the accusers] down in any way. I think it's a good thing [that they feel comfortable speaking out] and I support it."[9] Franco ultimately denied any abusive or manipulative behavior on his part.[10] The only specific comment Franco addressed was from Sheedy. Franco responded to Sheedy's tweets, stating, "I have total respect for [Sheedy] and I had no idea why she was upset."[11] That night Franco won a Critic's Choice Award but did not show up to accept it publicly.[12]

On Thursday, January 11, 2018, the *L.A. Times* published a long-form report detailing five women's experiences with Franco's alleged misconduct including Tither-

Kaplan's and Paley's extended testimonies. Franco was accused of offenses such as persuading women into appearing nude on camera, removing safety barriers during oral sex scenes, and physically pressuring young women into sexual acts.[13]

On January 20, 2018 at the Women's March L.A., actor Scarlett Johansson called out people who claim to support #TimesUp and #MeToo but who have a past of taking advantage of women.[14] She said, "How could a person publicly stand by an organization that helps to provide support for victims of sexual assault while privately preying on people who have no power? I want my pin back, by the way."[15] It has been confirmed that Johansson was indeed referring to Franco in her comment.[16] In my view, Johansson's comments effectively fold Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's testimonies into the history of #MeToo, pointing to them as an important moment of criticism and controversy in the campaign's formation. From this moment, #MeToo and Time's Up[17] marked a boundary effectively stating, "You cannot support us if you have a history of abusing us."

This particular moment in #MeToo's virality provides an insightful case study to understand how a digital counterpublic can discursively negotiate its boundaries to define a collective identity. #MeToo decided *if* there should be boundaries to participate in the digital counterpublic and *what* those boundaries should be. More specifically, this moment provoked the question: *What kind of person (character) is tolerated as a #MeToo participant?* Throughout the development of #MeToo, many other questions have been raised regarding who counts as participants, including those who identify across lines of sexuality (non-cis, female), gender, race, socioeconomic status, and employment. I chose to highlight the Franco controversy as a boundary-defining moment because it reveals "character" as a thread that is woven through many arguments made

within the first year of #MeToo—that is, the first year after Milano's tweet. The idea of character, and the specific boundary that it sets, will reemerge and even be called into question in the final chapter of this thesis. Therefore, it is necessary to explore not only how boundaries are investigated and expressed, but also how the Franco controversy created a specific boundary that was foundational to #MeToo's identity. The question of identity is especially important because a collective identity helps a counterpublic to cohere and eventually move together towards the state in protest of sexual misconduct. Before advancing my argument, I will explain why "counterpublics" is a central concept to my argument.

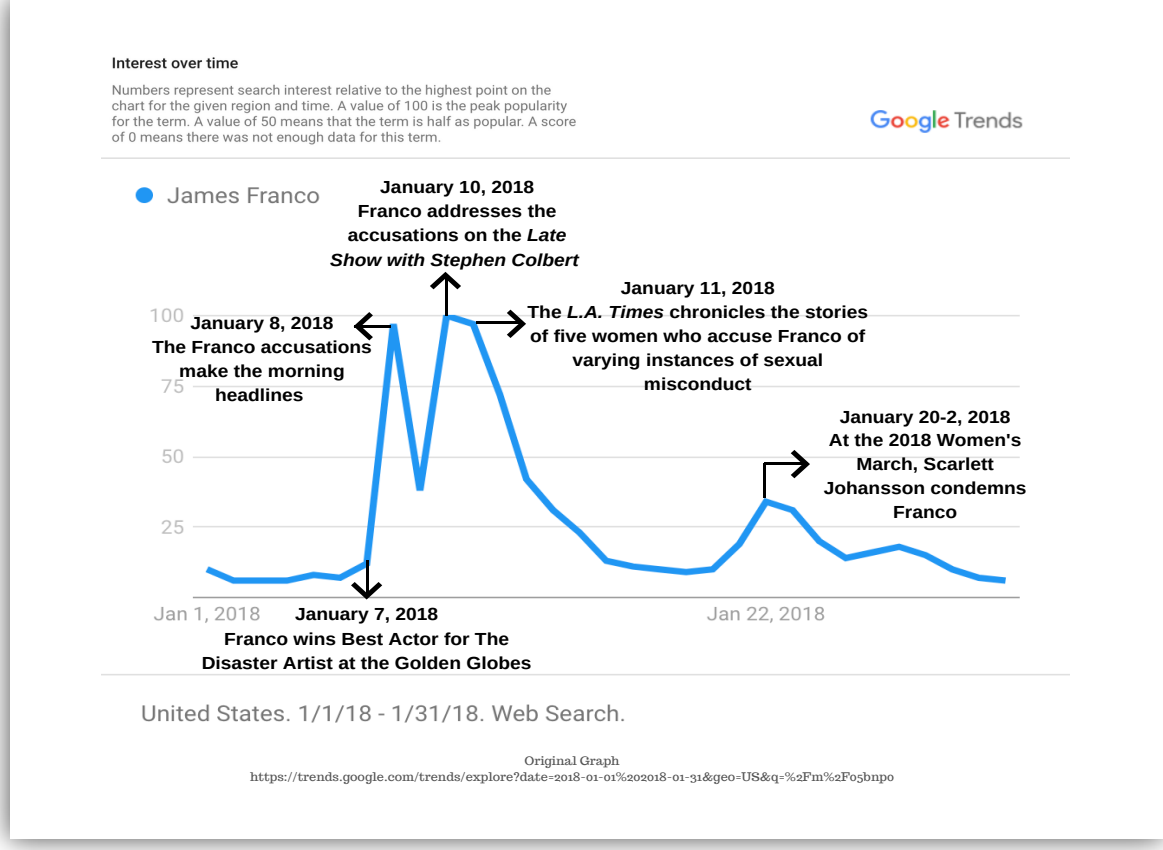

Figure 4 This Google Trends graph shows the relative interest (vis-à-vis Google web searches) in James Franco over the month of January in 2018. I have imposed the events discussed in this chapter on the graph to create a timeline for this flashpoint.

As discussed in Chapter 1, counterpublics emerged as a term to signify places of public resistance in opposition to the public sphere. Michael Warner defined publics rhetorically as a space of discourse,[18] constituted by mere attention[19] between strangers,[20] and organized by nothing other than the reflexive circulation of the discourse itself.[21] The public address must be both personal and impersonal such that it is distinguishable from forms of address to a particular person.[22] The public attempts to realize the world it characterizes through the address and acts historically according to the temporality of their circulation.[23] Warner argued that counterpublics have the qualities of publics but are distinct in that counterpublics are made up of members of a public who are constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominate public and are structured by different dispositions or protocols.[24] Warner described this conflictual relationship, stating, "A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one."[25] Warner argues that counterpublics are fundamentally mediated by public forms and the expansive estrangement of public speech as the condition for their common world. This is rather than simply comprising the expression of subaltern culture, [26] which Nancy Fraser conceptualizes in her theory of subaltern counterpublics.[27]

Identity is an important concept not only for the theorization of *what* a counterpublic is, but *who* a counterpublic claims to be. The rhetorical identity of a counterpublic, Gerard Hauser claimed, is as an arena for hearing proscribed voices, expressing proscribed ideas, and entertaining the alternative reality they advance to the existing order.[28] Counterpublics are critical for the construction of a common identity for

folx who wish to confront a governing body with demands. When counterpublics attempt to approach the state or a decision-making body (for nonpolitical public spheres) they often do so in the form of protest groups or social movements.[29] Counterpublics, therefore, serve as a pivotal discursive arena for the deliberation of common realities regarding the hegemonic public rule prior to coalescing as a social movement.

Rita Felski describes the importance of identity formation for counterpublics, especially feminist counterpublics.[30] Felski theorized counterpublic spheres as critical oppositional social forces that seek to define themselves against the homogenizing and universalizing logic of the global "megaculture" of modern mass communication as a debased "pseudopublic sphere." The counterpublic sphere aims to voice needs and articulate oppositional values that the "culture industry" fails to address.[31] Counterpublic spheres offer a critique of cultural values from the standpoint of the participants as a marginalized group within society.[32] Therefore, the oppositional communities are defined in terms of racial or ethnic identity or sexual preference, the experience of discrimination, oppression, and cultural dislocation that provides the motivation for the development of an oppositional identity.[33] The counterpublic sphere then serves a dual purpose to 1) *internally* generate an identity grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among the marginalized group, and to 2) *externally* seek to convince society as a whole of the validity of their claims and by challenging existing structures of authority through political activity and theoretical critique.[34] The realization of a common identity among individuals in the counterpublic is an important step of coherence *prior to* the counterpublic moving toward the state in protest.

While Warner's and Felski's contributions are apropos to understanding this phase in the #MeToo movement, they aren't able to fully explain *how* #MeToo's rhetoric functioned in a digital context. Activists who communicate, either primarily or in-part, through digital networked platforms craft counterpublics in unique ways. Movements or protests that originate or are formulated both online and offline cannot solely rely on pre-Web 2.0 case studies. It is clear from Felski's and Warner's work on counterpublic theory that forming a common identity is a crucial goal of counterpublics. However, what remains unclear is *how* such an identity can be formed on networked media. *Thus, this chapter aims to explain how #MeToo functioned as a digital counterpublic to define cohesive an identity through threads of confrontation that crowdsourced elites.* To that end, this chapter turns to digital activism scholarship to illuminate the process of identity construction in a digital counterpublic. I find that the process of crowdsourcing elites—a typical method of (s)electing leadership in a digital landscape—consequently modified ethos in a digital counterpublic to include the quantitative magnitude of an individual's impact (reach).

In the following I first explain how publics function in a digital environment and how feminist projects have benefitted from the mediated environment. Then, I will explain how a digital environment has changed the structure of leadership for many emancipatory projects. Finally, I will show how through a thread of confrontation, raised by Tither-Kaplan and Paley and settled by Johansson, solidified an identity forming boundary for the #MeToo digital counterpublic. These "threads of confrontation" are just one way that digital counterpublics can converge to define boundaries of their collective identity.

DIGITAL DISSIDENTS: DIGITAL COUNTERPUBLICS AS PLACES OF CONFRONTATION

This section aims to explain how publics function in a digital environment and what that means for #MeToo's development as a movement. The following will discuss how a digital environment informs and shapes counterpublics that emerge and sustain its presence on the platform. The fact that online counterpublics have a few rhetorically significant differences from offline counterpublics (e.g. they challenge the notion of a stable context, rhetor, and exigence of the situation) leads me to refer to such counterpublics as "digital counterpublics." These digital counterpublics and the hashtags with which they are frequently marked have specific noted rhetorical power especially for today's feminist projects. For many feminist projects these digital counterpublics, and the affordances of the digital environment, provide dissenting women with a barrier of protection between their activism and public backlash or physical violence. I argue that it is *exactly because* #MeToo is a digital counterpublic that it has experienced this level of virality and publicity in the mainstream media.

Publics and counterpublics that emerge and maintain a strong reliance on new communication technologies are informed and shaped by the medium. Technology and social media scholar danah boyd charted the architecture of networked publics with special attention paid to their distinct features.[35] Networked publics, she theorized, are publics that have been restructured by the networked technologies such that they are simultaneously the space constructed through networked technologies *and* the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice.[36] boyd began her theorization with the bits-based nature of digital environments,

then moved on to show how the affordances of networked publics are informed by the properties of bits, and finally highlighted the common dynamics that emerge from those affordances. The properties of networked publics introduce four affordances that shape publics and how people negotiate them. These affordances include: 1) *persistence*, or that online expressions are automatically recorded and archived, 2) *replicability*, or that content can be duplicated, 3) *scalability*, or the potential for great visibility of content, and 4) *searchability*, or the ability to access networked public content through key-term searches.[37] From these four affordances, boyd highlighted three dynamics that play a central role in shaping networked publics. First, an *invisible audience* means that individuals in networked publics usually rely on an imagined audience to assess appropriate topics and responses.[38] Second, *without the social, spatial, and temporal boundarie*s of non-digital communication, the collapsed boundaries of online communication make it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts.[39] boyd provided an informative example of the reality of collapsed contexts. She said:

> For example, events like weddings, in which context collisions are common, are frequently scripted to make everyone comfortable. Unexpected collisions, like running into one's boss while out with friends, can create awkwardness, but since both parties are typically aware of the collision, it can often be easy to make quick adjustments to one's behavior to address the awkward situation. In networked publics, contexts often collide such that the performer is unaware of audiences from different contexts, magnifying the awkwardness and making adjustments impossible.[40]

Yet, it is more than mere "awkwardness" that threatens such interactions. The recent occurrences of people losing their jobs, being denied college admissions, or even receiving death threats for what they publish online has made collapsed contexts a life-changing and possibly dangerous social dynamic to navigate.[41] Finally, with little or no "control" over contexts, the public and private become meaningless binaries that are scaled in new ways and are difficult to maintain as distinct.[42] Individuals must now renegotiate their relationship with privacy and question how they might regain a sense of control. boyd's theory of networked publics sets an important foreground for how the digital environment enables and constrains publics that emerge and sustain themselves on networked media. However, the question still remains, *how* are such networked publics united and identified?

Social networking content is not simply the result of communication affordances and constraints. The content is shaped by the medium of the social networking site. The medium itself creates meaning for groups in order to form collective identities. Internet scholar Zizi Papacharissi argued social media should be thought of as structures of feeling, or soft structures of storytelling, so that they may be examined as meaning-making practices with potential revolutionary effects.[43] Through this meaning-making process, hashtags serve as framing devices for news broadcasts. Hashtags, exemplified by a pound sign (#) followed by a thematic word or phrase, code a post into a collective site-wide discussion (feed, thread). Hashtags are not empty signifiers, rather they are open to definition, redefinition, and re-appropriation.[44] They allow crowds to be rendered into networked publics who want to tell their story collaboratively and their own terms.[45] Through analysis of the hashtags #egypt and #ows (Occupy Wall Street), Papacharissi

argued that the form of content or news streams generated was affective[46] in nature, and that *the streams served to discursively call into being* public formations, which she calls "affective publics."[47] Put simply, affective publics are public formations that are textually rendered into being through emotive expressions, which spread virally through networked crowds.[48] The affective publics serve as storytelling structures that sustain a modality of engagement.[49] These networked publics come together, or are disbanded, around bonds of affective sentiment and convene across networks that are discursively rendered out of mediated interactions.[50] Affective publics emerge on platforms like Twitter because their architecture specifically invites affective attunement, supports affective investment, and propagates affectively charged expression.[51] The specific social networking site will not make or break a revolution. Rather, social networking sites lend emerging networked publics their own distinct *mediality*, which shapes the texture of these publics. Meanwhile, affect is the drive that keeps the networked publics going.[52] To sum, publics that emerge online, while enabled and constrained in new ways, are valuable meaning-making media that have the possibility for revolutionary impacts.

Digital counterpublics is the term I use to refer to counterpublics that emerge and maintain a strong digital presence as they form a collective identity and coalesce into a social movement. boyd's theory of networked publics helps us to understand the affordances and constraints of the networked medium and Papacharissi's theory of affective publics helps to explain how groups come to be through the discursive emotive expressions on said networks. However, even more recently, and emblematic of #MeToo, counterpublics have begun to move between different web 2.0 environments in order to effectively meet their goals. As we see in this chapter's case study, the confrontation by

Tither-Kaplan and Paley begins on Twitter, moves to a (digital) newspaper report, then to a late-night talk show published on YouTube, and is finally settled with the digital recording of Johansson's Women's March speech, which was uploaded to YouTube and reported by multiple digital news sites.

Digital counterpublics have a few rhetorically significant differences compared to non-digital counterpublics insofar as they challenge the notion of a stable context, rhetor, and exigence of the rhetorical situation. Traditionally, a counterpublic's exigence is to rebuild, generate discourse, and then "counter" the oppressive discourse of the public. Digital counterpublics can "gather" in multiple places at once, in different sites under the banner of the same name/hashtag, communicate with one another at different times, and respond to constantly-evolving exigences. John Gallagher argued that the continuous nature of templates[53] (what I refer to as the architecture of a site) on Web 2.0 sites demonstrates that self-representation and presentation online are never fully formed and are always in the process of "*becoming.*"[54] Therefore, "audience" means something different to the content creator, to the content consumer, and to the content reporter. As boyd stated, the audience is frequently invisible and changing without the content creator's knowledge or intention. The pervasive nature of mediated publics means that the *always becoming* character has infinite opportunities to engage, grow, walk away, then come back. Simultaneously, exigences constantly evolve, which means that digital counterpublics *require* literal 24/7 attention, growth, and input. This *always becoming* makes digital counterpublics a place always at the tip of one's fingers ready to be added to, deleted from, or rearranged. A digital rhetorical situation, then, requires constant attention as they are never stable nor complete in their response.

Hashtags, scholars noted, have specific rhetorical power especially for today's feminist projects like #MeToo. Michelle Rodino-Colocino argued that the hashtag #YesAllWomen facilitated a key moment in the history of feminism because it provided an "insightful and inciting" mobilizing thread in the digital era of activism.[55] This is because, as Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher argued, hashtags generate space for discussion about every day issues, which gives digital media the radical potential for shouting back and highlighting issues like sexism, equality, misogyny, and rape culture.[56] For example, when a Twitter user posts a comment about their personal experience with harassment and then adds the #EverydaySexism hashtag, they join a group of users who also used the hashtag. In this sense, Twitter offers a digital place for feminists to document macro and micro examples of sexism in an effort to expose patriarchal culture and the unequal treatment of women.[57] Users of the same hashtag, then, can imagine that they share a dissenting place with members of a digital counterpublic. The hashtag itself creates an organized place where tagged dissenting texts are automatically archived and listed based on recency or popularity. Thus, hashtags create a specified place on the internet for the counterpublic participants to exist and interact separately from individualized home feeds.

Feminists have used the internet as a resourceful place for protests that have led to a marked shift in the paradigm of feminist protest culture. Hester Baer argued that, with the intersection of neoliberalism and private sphere politics of feminist social media, campaigns function as political actions that reframe feminism and "deploy the precarious female body to make visible contradictions of contemporary reality."[58] Feminist protests online emphasize the process of searching for new political paradigms, languages, and

symbols "that combat the neoliberal reduction of the of the political to the personal."[59] Online feminist protests are highly rhetorical as they negotiate meaning through symbol making on a new medium. Digital feminists, a designated name for feminists who primarily work online, ask questions about self-representation online, political and cultural production, and negotiating the public and private space.[60] Digital feminists do not view the internet as a place innately made for women to take over and radicalize, rather they view networked platforms as a way to focus one of the ways self-representation is performed and analyzed through a feminist perspective.[61] Rodino-Colocino claims digital feminism, like her case study of the hashtag campaign #YesAllWomen, demonstrated that "centuries old feminists issues are new again."[62] Rodino-Colocino argues that rather than signify a new "wave" of feminism tweets highlight "an enduring mobilizing issue—sexual violence—and problematize grounding feminist solidarity in white, middle-class, US-centric, heteronormative privilege."[63] She concludes that there are no waves of feminism only mobilizing threads and necessary action.[64]

The present moment of digital feminism has three documented differences from offline protest rhetoric. Digital feminist protests 1) promoted a dynamic new engagement with feminism through memes,[65] 2) brought together diverse feminist constituencies,[66] and 3) represent a move away from the emphasis on equality and rights pursued through conventional legal and legislative channels.[67] The internet, consequently, has been utilized by digital feminists as a central place for political action among diverse individuals in innovative ways. Thus, it is *exactly because* #MeToo is a digital counterpublic that moved between different web 2.0 environments and was afforded

certain protections that it experienced such a great level of virality and publicity in the mainstream media.

For any progressive campaign, confrontation is a key rhetorical maneuver for exposing what is flawed with the present. Confrontation, according to Robert Cathcart, is a "symbolic display acted out when one is in the throes of agon"[68] that "demands a response that goes beyond the actions of the confrontation itself. It is a dramatization created by the forced juxtaposing of two agents, one standing for the evil, erroneous system and the other upholding the new or 'perfect' order."[69] Confrontation is a significant act for social movements' ability to identify membership and force the establishment to reveal itself for what it is. However, when women and girls seek to confront perpetrators of sexual harassment, assault, and/or misconduct, they are positioned as a victim. Historically, when women and girls confront, they are thought to violate gendered expectations and are often met with social, political, and physical acts of resistance.[70] Furthermore, declaring oneself the victim of sexual harassment is frequently followed with a line of skeptical or blaming questions about the victims' behavior, dress, and attitude.

For many feminist projects digital counterpublics provide dissenting women with a barrier of "protection" between their confession (or criticism) and harmful public skepticism/backlash. Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller, summarized their findings from an analysis of over 800 pieces of digital content and 82 interviews with girls, women, and some men, about the potential pitfalls and promises of *doing* digital feminist activism.[71] They concluded that while *doing* activism is never easy, viral hashtag campaigns on Twitter, like #MeToo, were viewed as safer and easier spaces

for engaging in feminist activism than offline places such as the street, workplaces, schools, and among friends and family.[72] Social networking platforms also make women's and girls' voices and participation visible in ways that generate a ripple effect exemplified by #MeToo, "where many powerful (mainly white) men are being held accountable for historic instances of abuse and harassment."[73] Confrontation in the digital sphere may very well be the safer[74] and potentially more impactful route to social and political change, especially for those who experience sexual misconduct. The affordances provided by the medium of social networking sites give women and minorities a seemingly safe place to confront the hegemonic public sphere without major threat to their bodies or livelihoods.

Emergent Elites in Digital Counterpublics

The internet and web 2.0 services are a complex but important medium for activist work. The mediated and asynchronous features of social networking sites provide a seemingly safe place for historically marginalized groups to express their discontent with the current evil and erroneous system—as Cathcart calls it.[75] In the case of #MeToo, after partipants expressed their discontent (especially via the Franco controversy), the question of leadership was raised. *How do such disparate and mediated digital counterpublics organize leaders? Do they even need leaders?* The following will explain how networked platforms employ gatekeeping to crowdsource elites to positions of leadership in the digital counterpublic. This process of determining who counts as a leader of a digital counterpublic is important to understand *how* and *what* issues are raised for deliberation.

Typical late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century counterpublics and social movements took the form of traditional leader-*centric* or leader*less* groups. Some feminist groups of the 1960s and 1970s took the form of small, leaderless, consciousness raising groups that encouraged women to express their personal experiences and feelings.[76] In these groups there was no single leader, rhetor, or expert; all participants were considered experts and were encouraged to make the "personal political" in order to create awareness through shared experiences.[77] That said, prominent second wave feminist leaders, including Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Angela Davis, moved into the national mediated spotlight as they formed the National Organization for Women and the widely-circulated *Ms. Magazine*. In this sense, Second Wave feminism reflected the many "leader-centered" U.S. social movements that preceded it.

Social media's intervention in the communication and organization of counterpublics contributed to a shift to leader*ful* movements. Leaderful practice emerged as a theory in 21st century leadership scholarship. Scholars proposed a model of leadership that was mutual throughout all levels of practice and transformed leadership from being an individual property into an emerging paradigm that redefined leadership as a collective practice.[78] One example of a contemporary leaderful organization is Occupy Wall Street (#Occupy), which used social media heavily in their planning, organization, and message dissemination process. Occupy was notably criticized for being a leaderless movement with an undefined purpose. Sociologist Heather Gautney for the *Washington Post*'s roundtable on leadership, described the process of Occupy decision-making, explaining it as decidedly *not* leaderless. She wrote,

> Instead of issuing top-down directives, Occupy groups use a consensus process in which anyone can join in the decision-making and propose an idea. Proposers must field questions, justify the hows and whys of their ideas, and engage a large-scale group discussion. Votes are then cast via an innovative system of hand signals, and proposals are revised until a nine-tenths majority approves.[79]

In the case of Occupy, their organizational structure was (and is) not leader*less* rather it is leader*ful*. Ideally, every individual had equal opportunity to bring their arguments to the counterpublic and advocate a course of action. However, these individuals must be versed in the intricate hand signals and processes required to join the movement. In turn, those with that particular knowledge become elite leaders in the group's structuring. These kinds of exchanges can be productive communicative practices when individuals are physically gathered together in Zuccotti Park, however, message management for a counterpublic that exists centrally online, like that of #MeToo, requires a digital-centric theory of leadership in order to account for the architecture of a networked public.

#MeToo's primary reliance on social media is emblematic of a new structure of leadership common in digital landscapes known as "crowdsourcing elites." Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi theorized one approach networked publics have to manage messages and coherence as networked gatekeeping.[80] Networked gatekeeping describes a process where individuals on social networking sites (activists, journalists, nonelite media supporters, etc.) are crowdsourced to prominence through the pluralizing practices of retweeting, mentioning, and other addressivity markers.[81] The term crowdsourcing has been applied to social news climates (like Digg and Reddit) where the process of collective intelligence is captured in the social practices of voting, filtering, and

commenting on existing web content to highlight top news stories.[82] On Reddit, crowdsourcing is exemplified in their "up voting" feature, which prioritizes the most popular comments or posts to the top of each thread. On Twitter, crowdsourcing elites is exemplified through engagement with a post through addressivity markers: likes, retweets, and replies/mentions (@). An elites' status is contingent on the crowdsourced actions of nonelites, which, Meraz and Papacharissi argue, suggests a new symbiotic interrelationship between the influential and the ordinary in a manner that elevates the actions of nonelites as active participants in the realization of what is newsworthy.[83] These crowdsourced elites function as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers emerge "on the stream, attracting attention, employing transparency in reporting and verifying information, and directly interacting with the public through processes that were openly documented via their feeds."[84] Thus, networked gatekeepers are necessary for managing messages in mediated spaces and the determination of information relevancy (i.e. what is newsworthy). In the case of the Franco controversy, Tither-Kaplan and Paley emerged as networked gatekeepers, which not only enabled them to mark boundaries of inclusion for the digital counterpublic but also to animate how a digital counterpublic forms and develops.

DIGITAL COUNTERPUBLICS VIA THE FRANCO CONTROVERSY

Networked gatekeeping and specifically the process of crowdsourcing elites frames how #MeToo "chose" *whose* stories are cut from the Twitter feed and pasted on the morning headline. I argue that the process of crowdsourcing elites started an important thread of confrontation that would eventually aid in the creation of a boundary. A thread of confrontation is, as I see it, the disparate pieces of a continually developing

news story that unfolds across multiple digital environments. This case study follows the thread of confrontation set off by Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's tweets. The thread has three important moments that I will highlight and follow: 1) Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's accusation tweets the night of the Golden Globes, 2a) Franco's response to the accusations on the *Late Show* 2b) the *L.A. Times* report, and 3) Johansson's declaration that she wants "her" pin back at the Women's March, which was published to YouTube as well and written about in *W Magazine*. The boundary that this thread created, which states that individuals with a history of abusive behavior are not welcome in the #MeToo/#TimesUp digital counterpublic, consequently marked one point of identity for the digital counterpublic as *exactly not* abusers.

The process of crowdsourcing elites served the dual function of (s)electing gatekeepers *and* starting a thread of confrontation. As gatekeepers, Tither-Kaplan and Paley emerged on the #TimesUp stream with their tweets, attracted tens of thousands of likes, retweets, and replies, and interacted with the public on their respective feeds. Tither-Kaplan used her thread as a place to educate the general public (people who are not actors nor are familiar with the industry writ large) on the norms of acting contracts and how a set is expected to be run. "Nudity contracts are supposed to have FULL and DETAILED descriptions of nudity required,"[85] Tither-Kaplan responded to an individual who questioned how she could be sexually exploited if she signed a contract that agreed to a nude scene, "Sex scenes are supposed to be choreographed ahead of time. Nude scenes are never supposed to be improvised. This was never the case on the films I worked on."[86] Paley used her page to keep the public up-to-date on Franco's behavior; she tweeted about an "overdue, annoyed, phone 'apology'"[87] she received from Franco a

few weeks before the Golden Globes and started a separate thread to organize all the abuse allegations about Franco over the years.[88] More than just gatekeepers of the Franco-#TimesUp controversy, Tither-Kaplan and Paley's first call-out tweets mark the start of a thread of confrontation. Individually and together, Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's tweets cast Franco in the role of the personified "evil, erroneous system," as Cathcart called it.[89] Franco is not an ally, supporter, nor proponent for safe and fair workplace practices, he is, they argue, exactly what is wrong with the system. Afforded the "protection" of a mediated network, and the ease of participation produced by the virality of #MeToo, Tither-Kaplan and Paley confront Franco's hypocrisy while simultaneously constructing their ethos through a rhetorical maneuver called "interrupting."

Interrupting is a rhetorical maneuver for developing ethos that was theorized to account for women's constraints when constructing ethos. Contemporary feminist rhetoricians have assumed creative methods of constructing ethos in order to combat traditional, masculine, conceptions of credibility. Aristotle theorized ethos as encompassing three things "which inspire confidence in the orator's own character…that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill."[90] However, these three characteristics, in practice, were ascribed to men.[91] Construction of strong ethos is especially important for women in #MeToo as testimony is considered a weak form of evidence or unreliable. According to Aristotle this is because testimony was not from "detached persons."[92] Some contemporary scholars have dismissed personal testimony as subjective and a nongeneralizable form of evidence.[93] However, Catherine H. Palczewski argued that personal testimony is a source of evidence that can be determined valid through ideological framing and recognizing our own as

well as others' vocabulary.[94] To account for women's general ethos constraints, Kathleen J. Ryan Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones outline three types of women's practices of feminist ecological ethē[95] in an attempt to shift away from the Aristotelian framework. These conceptualizations of women's ethos work in new ways to account for interrelationality, materiality, and agency.[96] The three, frequently overlapping, approaches include ethē as interruption-interrupting, as advocacy-advocating, and as relation-relating. Although all three types of women's ethos are important for female rhetors of the past, present and future, ethē as "interruption-interrupting" takes into special account new media's impact on discourse and dissents. While this kind of confrontational rhetorical maneuver does have risks (i.e. inviting public criticism, being seen as a feminist traitor, etc.), it is also an important means to uncover and disrupt habits that hinder communication across differences.[97] The theorization of ethē as interruption-interrupting explores how women rhetors use rhetorical maneuvers to interrupt historical and contemporary normative discourses about women's bodies and minds and change discursive habits.

In the context of digital feminism, Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo observe how digital spaces facilitate contemporary women rhetors' opportunities to disrupt normative political discourses (ethē as interruption-interrupting).[98] They argue that web 2.0 technologies can be used to circumvent these normative discourses and attempt to silence them with diverse, dispersed, and (sometimes) temporary ethē.[99] The shift in the space of public address and by an opportunity for women's voices to be amplified by the voices of other women in a collaborative exchange highlights the affordances of web 2.0 services for women.[100] Digital spaces do not require women to "ask permission" to be

included in the conversation or to justify their right to speak. This new rhetorical space for women gives them deeper control over the context of their message and the distributed access of the message. [101] Further, it grants ethos based on lived experience.[102] Web 2.0 services, in this case Twitter, uniquely affords users with the ability to be one of many voices within an ongoing trending discussion.

Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's #TimesUp tweets disrupted the commentary about the Golden Globes protest and Franco's Golden Globe win with claims of misconduct and hypocrisy. Interruptions, understood as "breaks, divides, hitches, disruptions, disturbances, ruptures, or breeches—counters to traditional ways of behaving or conversing," are maneuvers that seek to change the status quo of dominant values and practices.[103] Tither-Kaplan's tweet followed by Paley's and Ally Sheedy's (now deleted) tweets, interrupted the #GoldenGlobes and #TimesUp feeds with repetitive accusations of misconduct on the part of Franco. These seemingly constant interruptions demonstrated the magnitude of the problem of Franco's misconduct; not unlike the magnitude that Milano called for in her original #MeToo tweet. Kyloo Lee and Jamison Webster theorize about this "magnitude" phenomenon with what they call "metony#metoo."[104] Lee and Webster argue that the metonymical structure of "me, too" created a "wildfire" spread of the movement that then aimed to point to a primal scene—both the open secret of misogynistic violence and the pain and impossibility of sexual relationships.[105] In the same way that #MeToo spoke to the general issue of sexual misconduct, the interruption*s* on the night of the Golden Globes created a similar wildfire in regards to Franco. Paley herself stated that it was the so-called "magnitude" that made her comfortable finally confronting Franco. She wrote in a tweet that night, "Another reason it's been hard to

come forward about this. [Franco and I] did have a consensual relationship as well. Unfortunately & fortunately, there are others who went through this same thing as me with him, and worse. I'm glad I am strong enough to speak up for all of us despite trolls."[106] Palczewski noted that the media response to the testimony of survivors in the pornography case she studied undermined the process of empowerment because respondents argued that the survivors were "unique," or, "in their words, something about the individual brought on the abuse."[107] Faced with multiple women accusing a single man of similar misconduct, the power of the "wildfire" of allegations papered over the typical "he said, she said" with the harder to deny "he said, they (essentialized, feminine) said."

If Tither-Kaplan's and Paley's tweets raised the issue of Franco's misconduct and deserved access to the digital counterpublic, the response by Franco on the *Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and subsequent reporting by the *L.A Times* acted as nuanced deliberation on the issue. To stay on Twitter, where character limits and collapsed contexts constrain an argument's development, would be detrimental to the deliberative process on such a complex and delicate topic. If one had to trace the thread of confrontation on a timeline, the first point would be Tither-Kaplan and Paley's tweets, and the second would occur the Tuesday night following the Golden Globes when Franco appeared on the *Late Show.* Colbert began the interview, which was published to the *Late Show* YouTube page, by asking Franco if he knew why he received so much criticism for wearing the Time's Up pin and if he had a response. Franco responded claiming he wore the Time's Up pin because he "supports change" and believes in the Time's Up initiatives, such as raising up LGBT people and people of color into positions of

leadership and "50/50 by 2020," which is the call for gender parity in the industry by 2020.[108] In regards to the tweets, he stated that he has heard about them but has not yet read them; he is unsure what he "did to Ally Sheedy,"[109] and has total respect for her. As for "the others" who tweeted about him (Tither-Kaplan and Paley are never mentioned by name), he stated, "The things that I heard that were on Twitter were not accurate," but he supports people's ability to come out and "have a voice."[110] Franco ended the interview segment stating that he is open to listen, learn, and change his perspective on issues. Franco gave a similar interview the next day on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*.[111]

To be clear: this deliberation *is not* about Franco's guilt or innocence, rather, it is about is *the kind* of person who is allowed to claim access and allyship with the #MeToo/#TimesUp digital counterpublic. When Franco is asked to speak on the controversy, he pleads his case as an ally deserving of a place in the digital counterpublic. He says that he "supports change" and although the accusations are "not accurate" he will not silence any woman's right to her "voice." When Colbert asks Franco if he knows of a way, outside of social media, to come to "some sense of what the truth is so there can be some sort of reconciliation between people who clearly have different views of things."[112] Franco claims that if there is restitution to be made, he will make it and fix any wrongs he has caused. Without ever apologizing or even acknowledging the claims made by Tither-Kaplan and Paley on Twitter, Franco builds the impassioned case that *if* he had done something wrong, *if* he had hurt someone, he *would* see to it that the wrong was righted because he prides himself on taking responsibility for things he has done. He states, "In my life I pride myself on taking responsibility for things that I've done, I have

to do that to maintain my wellbeing. I do it whenever I know that there's something wrong or needs to be changed."[113]

The next day, the *L.A. Times* reported that the five women they interviewed—Sarah Tither-Kaplan, Violet Paley, Hilary Dusome, Natalie Chimile, and Katie Ryan—accused Franco of "behavior they found to be inappropriate or sexually exploitive."[114] These women's accusations are, at most, a damaging civil lawsuit and at minimum a Human Resources issue. The heart of these accusations, besides the obvious corruption and abuse of Franco's behavior, is the hypocrisy of his support and thus his deserved access to the digital counterpublic.

At the Women's March 2018, Scarlett Johansson, an established leader, reiterated the growing consensus of the digital counterpublic that condoned individuals who prey(ed) on people with "no power." Such individuals were not welcome allies, and this claim consequently set a boundary of the digital counterpublic's access. The thread of confrontation that began with a tweet and accrued nuance with the help of the *L.A. Times* and the *Late Show*, finally ended with Scarlet Johansson's call for her pin back. Speaking as a representative of Time's Up, Johansson spoke about the question of consent versus coercion; she discussed her own revelations about relationships in her youth where she "compromised" her voice, "because it allowed me to have the approval that women are conditioned to need."[115] Johansson's declaration of "I want my pin back, by the way" came in the first minutes of her speech, which contextualized her story in the Franco controversy. Sharing her own experience with power dynamics in the entertainment industry, Johansson echoed many of the same sentiments as the women in the *L.A. Times* article. She stated,

> I was coming from a place like so many young women do feeling like my creative value and my professional value and my sexual value could only be measured by the approval and desirability of a man. Even if I had come from a household where the conversation about self-respect was prioritized just being a woman stacked the cards against me because for so many centuries women have been taught to be polite. To please and to pander.[116]

By adding her own story, Johansson intensifies the metonymic "wildfire" of the Franco accusations that Kyloo Lee and Jamison Webster described.[117] Her own story folds the accounts by Tither-Kaplan and Paley into the history of #MeToo while simultaneously legitimizing their claims. Specifically, her call to take back the symbol of Franco's supposed support of Time's Up, pinned proudly to his lapel, consequently set a boundary for the digital counterpublic. The boundary, which proclaimed that individuals with a history of sexually abusive or exploitive behavior were not allowed to participate in #MeToo/#TimesUp, also marked those with*in* the #MeToo digital counterpublic as *exactly not* perpetrators of misconduct or abusers. Excluding certain individuals by a marked a boundary simultaneously constructed a collective #MeToo identity that was relationally inverse to the boundary. *You are an abuser therefore we are not.*

CONCLUSIONS

To ask, "What is #MeToo?" is a simple enough question to answer. #MeToo is a digital counterpublic. It is not dissimilar from boyd's theorization of a networked public or Papacharissi's expansion that describes affective publics. Digital counterpublics take into account all the constraints and affordances of networked publics and affective publics but allow for the public to move to more long-form types of media when

necessary. A digital public is not constrained to social networking sites. Rather, what differentiates a networked public from a digital counterpublic is that that a digital counterpublic is able to use all digital forms of media available to best explicate a topic. Twitter may work quite well at interrupting a normative discourse and raising a topic for deliberation, but *deliberating* requires more nuance and time. And it may even require fact checkers and an editorial board.

To ask, "Who is #MeToo?" is a much more complex question to answer. Frequently, "Who is #MeToo?" posited a line of inquiry about the intersectional nature of the campaign. Many have argued that #MeToo is the movement for and by rich white women. While this may very well be the case, I argue that #MeToo's participants created the movement's identity discursively through threads of confrontation. These threads of confrontation begin by with the process of networked gatekeeping where elites are crowdsourced to prominence through engagement. Once an individual, and by proxy the topic they posted about, are (s)elected as relevant through crowdsourcing a deliberation period occurs amongst the digital counterpublic. This deliberation period is eventually put to an end by a declaration of consensus. While this may seem like a strictly linear process in this case, other threads, and even the future of this thread, may not always unfurl as such. As new information comes to be, threads can be raised once again and deliberated on more.

The Tither-Kaplan and Paley thread of confrontation raised for the deliberation the question "What *kind* of person is allowed in the digital counterpublic?" After interviews with Franco and the five women who accused him of misconduct were published, a metaphorical line in the sand was drawn by Johansson with the Women's

March declaration, “I want my pin back by the way.” It is important to note that this is a metaphorical line in the metaphorical sand. Though it may currently define the digital counterpublic as *exactly not* perpetrators of sexual misconduct, it does not mean this line cannot be called into questioned, altered, scuffed out, and redrawn. And thus, the identity of #MeToo simultaneously is questioned, altered, and redrawn. All of which strengthens the collective, but also creates the conditions of possibility to weaken it.

ENDNOTES

[1] I use the phrase sexual misconduct here in accordance with the revised AP Style Guidelines for reporting on such issues. The guidelines were revised due to the onslaught of news coverage about #MeToo. Lead stylebook editor Paula Froke stated in an interview with the *Columbia Journalism Review*, in May of 2018, "'Harassment has legal but broad definitions,' […] and sometimes 'harassment' may be too mild for the behavior being alleged. [Froke] urged that the reporting specify the behavior under discussion, and to use 'sexual misconduct' in more broad-based instances." Throughout this thesis I will abide by this advice, but, especially in this chapter, I will rely heavily on "sexual misconduct" as the specific instances Franco is accused of fall in varying places on the spectrum of aggressive overtures to sexual assault—as Ronan Farrow described it in the title of his pivotal investigative *New Yorker* report on Harvey Weinstein.

See, Merrill Perlman, "New *AP Stylebook* guidelines, influenced by #MeToo, hurricanes, and online polls," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 7, 2018, https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/ap-stylebook.php.

[2] Cara Buckley, "Powerful Hollywood Women Unveil Anti-Harassment Action Plan," *New York Times*.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Sarah Tither-Kaplan 🌈, "Hey James Franco, Nice #timesup Pin at the #GoldenGlobes , Remember a Few Weeks Ago When You Told Me the Full Nudity You Had Me Do in Two of Your Movies for $100/Day Wasn't Exploitative Because I Signed a

Contract to Do It? Times up on That!," Tweet, @*sarahtk* (blog), January 7, 2018, https://twitter.com/sarahtk/status/950165990213496832?lang=en.

[5] Violet Paley, "Cute #TIMESUP Pin James Franco. Remember the Time You Pushed My Head down in a Car towards Your Exposed Penis & That Other Time You Told My Friend to Come to Your Hotel When She Was 17? After You Had Already Been Caught Doing That to a Different 17 Year Old?," Tweet, @*violetpaley* (blog), January 7, 2018, https://twitter.com/violetpaley/status/950252181965410304?lang=en.

[6] Numerical figures gathered from tweets as of June 2019.

[7] For example of popular news articles about Franco from the night, see:

Emily Gaudette, "James Franco accused of sexual misconduct by some Twitter users after Golden Globe win," *Newsweek*, January 8, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/james-franco-disaster-artist-teen-girl-instagram-773914.; Nicole Pomarico, "James Franco Has Been Accused Of Sexual Misconduct By Two Women," *Bustle*, January 9, 2018, https://www.bustle.com/p/james-franco-has-been-accused-of-sexual-misconduct-by-two-women-7835508.

[8] Joanna Robinson, "Wy Did Ally Sheedy Call out Golden Globe Winner James Franco on Twitter?" *Vanity Fair*, January 8, 2018.

[9] The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, "James Franco Supports 'Time's Up,' Addresses Recent Accusations," *YouTube Video,* January 10, 2018, 2:36-2:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpEuHHMy-Z8.

[10] Ibid.

[11] The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, "James Franco Supports 'Time's Up.'"

[12] Daniel Miller and Amy Kaufman, "Five women accuse actor James Franco of inappropriate or sexually exploitative behavior," *L.A. Times*, January 11, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-james-franco-allegations-20180111-htmlstory.html.

[13] Daniel Miller and Amy Kaufman, "Five women accuse actor James Franco of inappropriate or sexually exploitative behavior," *L.A. Times*, January 11, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-james-franco-allegations-20180111-htmlstory.html.

[14] A note on hypocrisy: In September of 2019, while this thesis was being edited, Scarlett Johansson was asked how she felt about filmmaker Woody Allen in light of #MeToo by the *Hollywood Reporter*. Johansson stated, "I love Woody [Allen]. I believe him, and I would work with him anytime."

This is controversial and, frankly, hypocritical, because Allen was accused of sexually assaulting his 7-year-old adopted daughter Dylan Farrow in 1992. Allen's inappropriate behavior was witnessed by babysitters, friends, and family. During Mia Farrow and Woody Allen's divorce, a judge even stated that "measures must be taken to protect [Farrow]" in the final custody agreement.

In December of 2017, one month after Milano's first #MeToo tweet, Farrow wrote an op-ed in the *L.A.* Times questioning the morality of #MeToo's vilification of Harvey Weinstein and simultaneous deification Woody Allen.

I do not take the time of this note to rant about Johansson's hypocrisy—her belief in Allen's innocence (benevolence? nonmaleficence?) and not Franco's has stirred up commentary about her morals that I do not wish to indulge in this format. However, I do think it is important to draw attention to Johansson's imperfection in her own personal boundaries of sanctionable behavior. Johansson is not the perfect advocate for #MeToo nor is she the perfect gatekeeper. Her imperfection does not demean, diminish, or question the work she has done outlined in this chapter. Rather, her surviving love of Allen in the face of her hatred of Franco (and Weinstein) only further points to the complexities, intricacies, and impossible nuance of this issue.

See, Rebecca Keegan, "The Season of Scarlett Johansson: Two Hot Films, Her Marvel Future, Woody Allen and a Pick for President," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 4, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/scarlett-johansson-talks-woody-allen-elizabeth-warren-black-widow-1235618.; Dylan Farrow, "Op-Ed: Dylan Farrow: Why has the #MeToo revolution spared Woody Allen?" *L. A. Times*, December 7, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-farrow-woody-allen-me-too-20171207-story.html.; Mia Farrow, "Appendix: Findings of Fact," in *What Falls Away: A Memoir* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 333. The appendix of Farrow's memoir includes the transcripts of the decision in the custody proceedings.; Peter Marks, "Sitter Questions Allen Actions With Daughter," *New York Times*, April, 10, 1993, https://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/10/nyregion/sitter-questions-allen-actions-with-daughter.html.

[15] Elizabeth Logan, "Scarlett Johansson Wants Her #TimesUp Pin Back From James Franco," *W Magazine*, January 21, 2018, https://www.wmagazine.com/story/scarlett-johansson-womens-march-speech-james-franco.

[16] Jen Yamato, "Yes, Scarlett Johansson was calling out James Franco in her Women's March Speech," *L.A. Times*, January 20, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-entertainment-news-updates-2018-scarlett-johansson-james-franco-1516502535-htmlstory.html.

[17] It's important to note here that #MeToo and Time's Up are different campaigns in their goals and outreach agenda, however, they both draw upon the same counterpublic. Therefore, at times I may conflate the two since this is a discussion about the counterpublic and not necessarily the distinct goals/outreach agendas.

[18] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated version)" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002), 413.

[19] Ibid., 419.

[20] Ibid., 420.

[21] Ibid., 420.

[22] Ibid., 417.

[23] Ibid., 421.

[24] Ibid., 423.

[25] Ibid., 424.

[26] Ibid., 424.

[27] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere* ed. By Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142.

[28] Gerard A. Hauser, "Prisoners of Conscience and the Counterpublic Sphere of Prison Writing: The Stones that Start the Avalanche," in *Counterpublics and the State* ed. Robert Asen, Daniel C. Brouwer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 36.

[29] Robert Asen, Daniel C. Brouwer, *Counterpublic and the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 20.

[30] Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). See esp. chap. 5, "Politics, Aesthetics, and the Feminist Public Sphere."

[31] Ibid., 166.

[32] Ibid., 167.

[33] Ibid., 167.

[34] Ibid., 168.

[35] danah boyd, "Social Networking Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances Dynamics, and Implications," in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2011): 39-59.

[36] Ibid., 39.

[37] Ibid., 46-48.

[38] Ibid., 49-50.

[39] Ibid., 50-1.

[40] Ibid., 51.

[41] Doxxing is a popular internet attack where an individual's personal and private information (credit card numbers to home address) are released on a public website. The Twitter phenome #HasJustineLandedYet is a great example of this.

See, Jon Ronson, "How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco's Life," *New York Times,* February 12, 2015, Accessed November 1, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/how-one-stupid-tweet-ruined-justine-saccos-life.html.

[42] Ibid., 51-2.

[43] Zizi Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and structures of storytelling: sentiment, events, and mediality," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016), DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697, 14.

[44] Ibid., 2.

[45] Ibid., 2.

[46] Papacharissi defines affect as a form of pre-emotive intensity subjectively experienced and connected to processes of premediation or anticipation of events prior to their occurrence. Papacharissi drew mainly from Damasio, Tomkins, Massumi, Protevi, Grusin, Grossberg, and Seigworth and Gregg in conceptualizing affect. See page 308.

[47] Zizi Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and structures of storytellin," 4.

[48] Ibid., 14.

[49] Ibid., 14.

[50] Ibid., 2.

[51] Ibid., 2.

[52] Ibid., 2.

[53] Templates are also known as the architecture of a website or the form of a site that standardizes posts or profiles. For instance, everybody's Facebook profile page has the same widgets, the same places to fill in information, the same size profile picture and cover photo, etc.

[54] John R. Gallagher, "The Rhetorical Template" *Computers and Composition* 35 (2015), 10.

[55] Michelle Rodino-Colocino, "#YesAllWomen: Intersectional Mobilization Against Sexual Assault is Radical (Again)" *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014): 1113-1115.

[56] Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher, "Tweeting back while shouting back: Social media and feminist activism," *Feminism & Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2018): 128-132.

[57] Ibid., 130.

[58] Hester Baer, "Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016), 30.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Amy Shield Dobson. *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self Representation*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 4.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Michelle Rodino-Colocino, "#YesAllWomen," 1113.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Michelle Rodino-Colocino, "#YesAllWomen," 1114.

[65] Samantha Thrift, "#YesAllWomen as Feminist Meme Event" *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 6 (2014): 1090-1092.

[66] Fredrika Thelandersson, "A Less Toxic Feminism: Can the Internet Solve the Age Old Question of How to Put Intersectional Theory into Practice?" *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 527-530.

[67] Zakia Salime, "New Feminism as Personal Revolutions: Microrebellious Bodies" *Signs* 40, no. 1 (2014): 14-20.

[68] Robert Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form," *Southern Communication Journal* 43, no. 3 (1978), 235.

[69] Ibid., 246.

[70] Catherine H. Palczewski, "Survivor Testimony in the Pornography Controversy: Assessing Credibility in the Minneapolis Hearings and the Attorney General's Report," in *Warranting Assent: Case Studies in Argument Evaluation* ed. By Edward Schiappa (Albany: State of New York Press, 1995): 257-281.

[71] Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, Jessalynn Keller, "#MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital activism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 24, no. 2 (2018): 236-246.

[72] Ibid., 243.

[73] Ibid., 244.

[74] I discuss the dangerous side of the internet more in depth in chapter four, section "Feminism, New Media, and Contemporary Rhetoric." However, for now it is important to say that many women have experienced what can only be described as "horrific" backlash for existing online. Exemplars of this include "Gamergate," which was a harassment campaign organized by (mainly) men on anonymous message boards that targeted women in the video game industry for speaking up about sexism and misogyny in video games. Women were frequently doxed, threated with rape and murder, and forced many women to move homes due to IRL harassment. See, Caitlin Dewey, "The only guide to Gamergae you will ever need to read," *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/?utm_term=.2940fb50f42c.

Another instance of dangerous sexist backlash women experience for existing online includes what was horrifically named the "Fappening," which is a portmanteau of "The Happening" and "fap," an internet slang for male masturbation. This event occurred in August of 2014 when almost 500 private photographs (many containing nudity) of mainly celebrity women were posted on 4Chan message boards. Images were stolen from personal iCloud accounts by hackers. The real-world implications of such a violation could take up the space of an entire second thesis.

[75] Robert Cathcart, "Movements," 264.

[76] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59, no. 1 (1973), 79.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Joseph A. Raelin, "We the Leaders: In Order to Form a Leaderful Organization," *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 12, no. 2 (2005), 18-9.

[79] Heather Gautney, "What is Occupy Wall Street? The history of leaderless movements," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/what-is-occupy-wall-street-the-history-of-leaderless-movements/2011/10/10/gIQAwkFjaL_story.html?utm_term=.9f5af590431f.

[80] Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi, "Networked Gatekeeping and Networked Framing on #Egypt," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18, no. 2 (2013): 138-166.

[81] Ibid., 158.

[82] Sharon Meraz, "The Many Faced 'You' of Social Media," in *Journalism and Citizenship: New Agendas in Communication* ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2009): 123-48.

[83] Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi, "Networked Gatekeeping and Networked Framing on #Egypt," 160.

[84] Ibid., 158.

[85] Sarah Tither-Kaplan 🌈, "Nudity Contracts Are Supposed to Have FULL and DETAILED Descriptions of Nudity Required. Sex Scenes Are Supposed to Be Choreographed Ahead of Time. Nude Scenes Are Never Supposed to Be Improvised. This Was Never the Case on the Films I Worked On.," Tweet, @*sarahtk* (blog),

January 7, 2018, https://twitter.com/sarahtk/status/950258649984741376. Emphasis hers.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Violet Paley, "A Couple Weeks Ago, James Offered Me & a Few Other Girls an Overdue, Annoyed, Convenient Phone 'Apology'. I Don't Accept, but Maybe Some Other People's Lives Would Be Made Easier If He Donated All of His Earnings from 'The Disaster Artist' to @RAINN01.," Tweet, @*violetpaley* (blog), January 9, 2018, https://twitter.com/violetpaley/status/950763364602523648?lang=en.

[88] Violet Paley, "THREAD: Accusations over the Years about James Franco Lucy Clode, 17 Who He Tried to Get to His Hotel over Instagram Messages. Tatjana Matthews, James' Assistant of over 2 Years Who He Verbally Abused and Didn't Allow to Date Anyone but Him and Fired Her for It. She Witnessed," Tweet, @*violetpaley* (blog), October 9, 2018, https://twitter.com/violetpaley/status/1049675187598254080.

[89] Robert Cathcart, "Movements," 246.

[90] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), Book II, Part I, Paragraph III.

[91] Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, "Introduction: Identifying Ecological Ethē," in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric* (Carbondale, SIU Press, 2016), 5.

[92] Aristotle, *Basic Works*, 1376a, p 15 quoted in Catherine H. Palczewski, "Survivor Testimony in the Pornography Controversy: Assessing Credibility in the Minneapolis Hearings and the Attorney General's Report," in *Warranting Assent: Case Studies in*

Argument Evaluation ed. By Edward Schiappa (Albany: State of New York Press, 1995): 259.

[93] See, Gerard Hauser, "Defining publics and reconstructing public spheres: The final report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography" and Ian Fielding "Causal argument in the final report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography," in *Argument and Critical Practices: Proceedings of the Fifth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation* ed. By Joseph W. Wenzel (Annandale: Speech Communication Association, 1987).

[94] Catherine H. Palczewski, "Survivor Testimony in the Pornography Controversy," 260.

[95] The author's note they have chosen to use ethē as the plural of ethos, rather than ethea, because they use the Attic Greek of Aeschylus and Aristotle rather than the Ionic Greek of Homer. See, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, *Rethinking Ethos,* footnote 1, page 15.

[96] Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, "Preface," in *Rethinking Ethos*, vii.

[97] Valerie R. Renegar and Stacey K. Sowards, "Contradiction as Agency: Self-Determination, Transcendence, and Counter-Imagination in Third Wave Feminism" *Hypatia* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 1-20.

[98] Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo, "Changing Audience, Changing Ethos," in *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric* ed. Kathleen J. Ryan Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones (Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 89-109.

[99] Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, "Preface," in *Rethinking Ethos*, v.

[100] Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo, "Changing Audience, Changing Ethos," in *Rethinking Ethos*, 89.

[101] Ibid., 100.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Kathleen J. Ryan Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2016),

[104] Kyloo Lee and Jamieson Webster, "The Formative Power of Metony#MeToo," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 19, no. 4 (2018):249-253.

[105] Ibid., 252.

[106] Violet Paley, "Another Reason It's Been Hard to Come Forward about This. We Did Have a Consensual Relationship as Well. Unfortunately & Fortunately, There Are Others Who Went through This Same Thing as Me with Him, and Worse. I'm Glad I Am Strong Enough to Speak up for All of Us despite Trolls," Tweet, @*violetpaley* (blog), January 8, 2018, https://twitter.com/violetpaley/status/950564316297809920?lang=en.

[107] Catherine H. Palczewski, "Survivor Testimony in the Pornography Controversy," 278.

[108] The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, "James Franco Supports 'Time's Up,'" 1:00-1:20.

[109] Ibid., 1:38-1:42.

[110] Ibid., 2:20-2:30.

[111] Late Night with Seth Meyers, "James Franco Addresses His Sexual Misconduct Allegations," *YouTube Video*, January 11, 2018, 3:32. https://youtu.be/nRJuIrO9GaU.

[112] The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, "James Franco Supports 'Time's Up,'" 3:09-3:17.

[113] Ibid., 2:00-2:18.

[114] Daniel Miller and Amy Kaufman, "Five women accuse actor James Franco," *L.A. Times*.

[115] Scarlett Johansson, "Women's March: Scarlett Johansson, Viola Davis, Halsey Speeches," *Rolling Stone*, 2: 58, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/womens-march-see-rousing-speeches-from-halsey-viola-davis-scarlett-johansson-127017/?jwsource=cl.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Kyloo Lee and Jamison Webster, "The Formative Power of Metony#MeToo," 252.

CHAPTER 3

GO FUND ME A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: THE CONSTITUTION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

On November 10, 2017, one month after the first #MeToo tweet, the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (National Farmworker Women's Alliance, hereafter Alianza), a union of 700,000 women who work in the agricultural fields and packaging sheds across the United States, wrote an open letter to the women of Hollywood in *Time Magazine*.[1] In the letter, the Alianza acknowledged the women of Hollywood's recent publicized experiences of sexual misconduct in their workplace and wrote that they understood the experience of gender-based violence at the hands of bosses, co-workers, and other powerful individuals within the industry.[2] The Alianza letter served two main purposes. First, it leveraged the #MeToo virality to promote the upcoming "The Take Back the Workplace" march in Los Angeles. Second, the Alianza letter functioned as a long-form "Us, too" from one industry (agriculture) to another (entertainment, film). The Alianza argued that gender-based violence is pervasive in all industries and noted the particular danger that underprivileged people of color experience. They write, "reporting any kind of harm or injustice committed against us doesn't seem like a viable option. Complaining about anything—even sexual harassment—seems unthinkable because too much is at risk, including the ability to feed our families and preserve our reputations."[3] This letter, which began with "Dear Sisters" and signed-off "In Solidarity," was an important

catalyst for the creation of an organization that would mobilize and cohere the #MeToo digital counterpublic into a social movement with actionable, political and social, goals.

On January 1, 2018, nearly 300 female, Hollywood, #MeToo leaders and supporters responded to the Alianza in an open letter published in the *New York Times* and the Spanish-language *La Opinion.* [4] The letter followed the same format as the Alianza letter; it opened with "Dear Sisters" and closed with "In Solidarity." The Time's Up open letter both acknowledged the privilege that the women of Hollywood have due to their socioeconomic status and their celebrity platform.[5] It also announced the launch of the Time's Up organization, which is comprised of Time's Up Now, a social welfare 501(c)(4), and Time's Up Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity.[6] The Time's Up letter codified the goals and agenda of the #MeToo digital counterpublic in four "ambitious, sprawling initiative[s] to fight systemic sexual harassment in Hollywood and in blue-collar workplaces nationwide."[7] The initiatives included:

1) A legal defense fund that was initially seeded with $13-million of donations by the original signatories. The fund would help less privileged women protect themselves from sexual misconduct and the fallout from reporting it. The legal defense fund was published on GoFundMe, a crowdfunding website, and raised $24.2 million in donations by 21,662 people in a 20-month period.[8] In June of 2019 Time's Up moved their donations system from GoFundMe to their private webpage
2) Legislation to penalize companies that tolerate persistent harassment, and to discourage the use of nondisclosure agreements to silence "victims."[9]

3) A drive to reach gender parity at studios and talent agencies (in partnership with the group 50/50by2020, who already started this work).[10]
4) Request that the women walking the red carpet at the 75th annual Golden Globes speak out and raise awareness by wearing black.[11]

A year later, Time's Up added another initiative called "The 4% Challenge," which called actors to commit to working with a female director in the next 18 months because only 4% of the top 100 studio films over the last decade had been directed by women.[12]

JANUARY 1, 2018

Dear Sisters,

We write on behalf of over 300 women who work in film, television and theater. A little more than two months ago, courageous individuals revealed the dark truth of ongoing sexual harassment and assault by powerful people in the entertainment industry. At one of our most difficult and vulnerable moments, Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (the National Farmworker Women's Alliance) sent us a powerful and compassionate message of solidarity for which we are deeply grateful.

To the members of Alianza and farmworker women across the country, we see you, we thank you, and we acknowledge the heavy weight of our common experience of being preyed upon, harassed, and exploited by those who abuse their power and threaten our physical and economic security. We have similarly suppressed the violence and demeaning harassment for fear that we will be attacked and ruined in the process of speaking out. We share your feelings of anger and shame. We harbor fear that no one will believe us, that we will look weak or that we will be dismissed; and we are terrified that we will be fired or never hired again in retaliation.

We also recognize our privilege and the fact that we have access to enormous platforms to amplify our voices. Both of which have drawn and driven widespread attention to the existence of this problem in our industry that farmworker women and countless individuals employed in other industries have not been afforded.

To every woman employed in agriculture who has had to fend off unwanted sexual advances from her boss, every housekeeper who has tried to escape an assaultive guest, every janitor trapped nightly in a building with a predatory supervisor, every waitress grabbed by a customer and expected to take it with a smile, every garment and factory worker forced to trade sexual acts for more shifts, every domestic worker or home health aide forcibly touched by a client, every immigrant woman silenced by the threat of her undocumented status being reported in retaliation for speaking up and to women in every industry who are subjected to indignities and offensive behavior that they are expected to tolerate in order to make a living: We stand with you. We support you.

Now, unlike ever before, our access to the media and to important decision makers has the potential of leading to real accountability and consequences. We want all survivors of sexual harassment, everywhere, to be heard, to be believed, and to know that accountability is possible.

We also want all victims and survivors to be able to access justice and support for the wrongdoing they have endured. We particularly want to lift up the voices, power, and strength of women working in low-wage industries where the lack of financial stability makes them vulnerable to high rates of gender-based violence and exploitation.

Unfortunately, too many centers of power – from legislatures to boardrooms to executive suites and management to academia – lack gender parity and women do not have equal decision-making authority. This systemic gender-inequality and imbalance of power fosters an environment that is ripe for abuse and harassment against women. Therefore, we call for a significant increase of women in positions of leadership and power across industries. In addition, we seek equal representation, opportunities, benefits and pay for all women workers, not to mention greater representation of women of color, immigrant women, disabled women, and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, whose experiences in the workforce are often significantly worse than their white, cisgender, straight peers. The struggle for women to break in, to rise up the ranks and to simply be heard and acknowledged in male-dominated workplaces must end; time's up on this impenetrable monopoly.

We are grateful to the many individuals – survivors and allies – who are speaking out and forcing the conversation about sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gender bias out of the shadows and into the spotlight. We fervently urge the media covering the disclosures by people in Hollywood to spend equal time on the myriad experiences of individuals working in less glamorized and valorized trades.

Harassment too often persists because perpetrators and employers never face any consequences. This is often because survivors, particularly those working in low-wage industries, don't have the resources to fight back. As a first step towards helping women and men across the country seek justice, the signatories of this letter will be seeding a legal fund to help survivors of sexual assault and harassment across all industries challenge those responsible for the harm against them and give voice to their experiences.

We remain committed to holding our own workplaces accountable, pushing for swift and effective change to make the entertainment industry a safe and equitable place for everyone, and telling women's stories through our eyes and voices with the goal of shifting our society's perception and treatment of women.

In Solidarity

Figure 5 The letter from the Time's Up organization, which was published as a full-page ad in the New York Times on January 1, 2018.

Time's Up, referred to as #TimesUp on social networking sites, came on the heels of months of questioning what to *do* with the power accrued by the virality of #MeToo. Less than two weeks after Milano's viral tweet, on October 28, 2017, *The Guardian* declared, "#MeToo is here to stay,"[13] as analysts tracked the hashtags virality and saturation of the mainstream news cycle. By December 2017, commentators began to project #MeToo's potential impacts. For example, the *National Women's Law Center* published resources for advocating change in sexual harassment policies and behaviors,[14] and the Art Rage Gallery of central New York City hosted an open and free panel discussion called "#Me Too, What's Next?"[15] *Ms. Magazine* published a blog entitled, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Anita Hill, #MeToo and What Comes Next."[16] Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* published an editorial arguing that #MeToo could not just be about raising awareness but must also work to improve law and policy and bolster women's economic status.[17] A day after the *Tribune* editorial was published online, the Time's Up organization answered the plea with the open letter, two non-profits, and a $13 million legal defense fund.

Pause: Let us digress for an important moment of clarification on the difference between #MeToo and Time's Up. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, Time's Up and #MeToo are easily conflated at this point in the movement's timeline. Since Tarana Burke created and founded "Me, too" and has created a separate social movement,[18] #MeToo—that which began online with Alyssa Milano's tweet—conducts its politics through the Time's Up organization. This is all to say that #MeToo leaders frequently do activism through Time's Up and become de facto Time's Up leaders. However, even though #MeToo and Time's Up can be conflated in terms of the *people who participate*, I

make the distinction between #MeToo and Time's Up here because Time's Up—as I will make clear through this chapter—is a social movement interested in confronting the public and inciting social and political change whereas #MeToo is frequently a consummatory campaign with the primary goal of raising awareness about sexual misconduct through "slacktivist" methodologies.

This defining moment in #MeToo's development provides an insightful case study to understand how a digital counterpublic can cohere and mobilize into action as a social movement with political goals and plans. Though it is not necessarily the goal of every digital counterpublic to demand political and social change, the growing consensus voiced a desire to use #MeToo's social capital to initiate political and/or social change. It is in this moment that #MeToo asked together with, and sometimes through, the Times Up organization, *how does a digital counterpublic move to engage the public and confront the state as an organized social movement?* The question of what digital activism *is*, and its effects, is an important question for scholars of rhetoric and digital communication who typically characterize digital activism in one of two overdetermined ways: either as the savior of equality or as an enemy of progress.

The popularization and growth of digital activism has pushed critics to define what *is* "activism" online. To summarize what was discussed in the introduction, techno-utopian scholars argue that the increase in information available to the people due to the creation of the internet and consequently the exchanging of ideas will lead to enhanced political participation, civil society, and democracy.[19] Conversely, techno-dystopian scholars argue that the internet is a weapon of manipulation wielded by governments and corporations to legitimize their own identities,[20] and they warn of the demeaning political

discourse that takes place on the Internet as a threat to democracy.[21] One of the most popular criticisms of online activism—slacktivism—was conceptualized by Evgeny Morozov. Slacktivism, a pejorative term that combines slacker with activism, created a distinction between "good" and "bad" activism. Also known as clicktivism, slacktivism is generally defined as quasi-activism that requires little time or involvement to participate.[22] Morozov called slacktivism the dangerous sibling of digital activism that makes activists feel important and useful but has "preciously little" political impact.[23] A typical example of online slacktivism provided by Morozov is a Facebook page (Saving the Children of Africa) that accrued 1.7 million members but had only raised about $12,000, which averages to less than one-hundredth of a penny per person in donations.[24] Morozov argues this is a problem because most people spend (at best) a few hours a month on improving the common good, and digital activism provides too many easy ways out.[25] This critical view of online activism argues that "real" effective activism is jeopardized by slacktivism because individuals engage in protests for narcissistic or selfish purposes. In an interview with the *New York Times*. Morozov stated, "Sometimes, it may be as simple as trying to impress their online friends, and once you have fashioned that identity, there is very little reason to actually do anything else."[26] A rhetorical analysis of social movements, however, helps us to see how digital activism works without taking a deterministic view of its potential.

This desire to be "selfish"—as Morozov stated—in activism is to affirm one's identity. I do not venture to argue that slacktivism is not a real or true phenomenon, rather this is to say that many seemingly selfish endeavors have important rhetorical implications for the collective identity of a social movement. Richard Gregg theorized the

"the ego function" long before digital activism became the norm.[27] Gregg argued that the primary appeal of the rhetoric of protest was to the protestors themselves, "who feel the need for psychological refurbishing and affirmation."[28] The second appeal of the ego-function of rhetoric had to do with *constituting* self-hood through expression.[29] By establishing, defining, and affirming one's self-hood one is engaging in a rhetorical act where rhetoric takes on aspects of *both* act and appeal simultaneously.[30] An individual's identity is not the only identity established, defined, and affirmed. Gregg states, "We must be aware that at the same time an individual is engaged in a rhetorical act for the primary purpose of establishing his own identity to himself, he may also, acting as a surrogate, aid in the establishment of identities for others."[31] Gregg continues to explain the dimensions of the ego-function as three parts: 1) *ego-formation*, a response to ego-deprivation where groups construct their own positive sense of identity to replace the identity imposed on them,[32] 2) *ego-maintenance*, discursive practices that are invented to celebrate the newly constituted identity,[33] and 3) *ego-destruction*, when the "old" self or identity must be destroyed for the new self to emerge or when individuals outside of the group are identified as enemies to enhance the establishment of selfhood.[34]

Morozov's criticism of online activism as "slacktivism" is important to understand the prevailing opinion on internet activism, and Gregg's theory of the ego-function both problematizes Morozov's criticism and provides and insightful explanation about the discursive process of individual and collective identity formation in social movements. However, to say there is *no* difference between online social movements and historical (meaning, pre-internet) movements would be an injustice to the nuances of contemporary social movements. *Thus, this chapter argues that social movements that*

primarily emerge on and maintain a presence online must be conceptualized as distinct from digital campaigns. Digital campaigns do not construct a collective identity that drives an agenda for political or social change. With this conceptualization in mind, I move to the open letters exchanged by the Alianza and Time's Up and argue that these letters served as a constitutive rhetoric, which constituted #MeToo as a social movement.

A close-textual analysis of the Time's Up open letter, guided by Maurice Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric will attend to the ways the letters construct an essentialized narrative of the #MeToo audience. Bound together by their feminist ideological history and constituted by *a collective identity defined not in name but similar experiences*, the collective was able to set an agenda and move to the state and public in actionable steps. This analysis will elucidate the ways in which the open letters were able to construct a narrative that constituted the multiple, albeit individual, #MeToo participants from objects acted upon to subjects capable of persuasion. To advance this claim, I will elucidate how the rise of digital activism challenged and altered the ways in which groups mobilize for political change and consequently altered the definitional characteristics of social movements. To compromise the definitional power of social movements is to collapse the important differences between movements and other types of campaigns. Instead of ignoring these nuances, I argue that contemporary online activism utilizes tactics for protest untested by historical protestors. This difference does not mean that online social movements do not exist, rather, it points to a change in the definitional characteristics and entailments of modern (internet age) social movements. To further elucidate these differences, I draw special attention to the differences between what I will call "internet campaigns"—an online group that prioritizes spreading

awareness of an issue—and social movements that emerge and sustain a presence in an online environment.

Definitional Nuances of Social Movements

Social movement scholars have wrangled over the definitional and characteristic entailments of social movements for decades. The following traces these ongoing conversations with special attention paid to how the rise of digital activism challenged and altered the ways in which groups mobilized for social and political change.

Early definitions of social movements in rhetorical studies were frequently rigid and/or lacking a rhetorical foundation. In 1952, Leland Griffin proposed a direction for students who study movements. He broadly defined historical movements when he writes about the "point of focus" of movement studies, stating, "For as the historical movement, looked upon as a sustained process of social inference, is dynamic, and has its beginning, its progression, and its termination, so the rhetorical component of the movement is dynamic, and has its inception, its development, and its consummation."[35] This definition marks three criterion for a social movement: first it is something that occurred in the past (historical), second, it is linear (inception, crisis, and resolution), and third it has a historical *and* a rhetorical component. These criteria, though effectively define a social movement, are also restrictive for study of contemporary social movements.

Not only could definitions be rigid, but they also needed a rhetorical foundation. Herbert W. Simons, in providing a *leader-centered* conception of persuasion in social movements, delivered another definition of 'social movement.' Simons, using conceptions by sociologists Neil Smelser and Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, defined social movements as an "uninstitutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to

implement a program for the reconstitution of social norms and values."[36] Simons distinguished social movements from panics, crazes, and actions of recognized labor unions and other organized decision-making bodies. Some rhetorical scholars criticized these foundational definitions and conceptualized new ways to understand social movements. For instance, Robert Cathcart, critical of such "ill-fitting" conceptions, presented a dramatistic definition of social movements, arguing that it is the "*reciprocity* or *dialectical enjoinment in the moral arena* which defines movements and distinguishes them from dramatistic forms. The essential attribute here is the creation of the *dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict*."[37] Later, Cathcart narrowed his definition further stating that the word "movement" may only be used when referring to a confrontation against the establishment.[38] In response to such foundational yet strict definitions of social movements, scholars began to offer theorizations that swung to the opposite end of the pendulum of rigidity.

Rhetorical scholars in the 1980s took up the definitional challenge of social movements: some pondering the necessity to define and others casting the widest net. David Zarefsky has been generally suspicious of definitional claims. When analyzing Charles Wilkinson's qualification of Cathcart's "dialectical tension" definition, Zarefsky noted that Wilkinson didn't make a distinction between movements and long-term persuasive campaigns generally. Contemplating the inability to separate movements from persuasive campaigns Zarefsky suggests that there may not be a fundamental difference and that movements are simply a prototype for *all* long-term persuasive ventures.[39] Three years later, Zarefsky argued that "What is true of movement studies may be true of other types as well: that we have created constructs and rhetorical categories prematurely, and

on an *a priori* basis rather than as the outgrowth of historical research."[40] However, some scholars viewed defining movements not as "imprisoning ourselves in our own assumptions and arbitrarily limiting the force of our generalizations,"[41] but rather as an opportunity to give each critic the ability to define any given movement. Malcolm O. Sillars identified four critical limitations of movement scholarship of the past: 1) the assumption of linearity, 2) the overemphasis on cause and effect reasoning, 3) stress on intentionality, and 4) restrictive definitions.[42] Noting these limitations, Sillars then argued that the solution to the definitional problem was to "cast the widest net" and let the individual critic define each movement. He wrote, "Movements, then, are collective actions which are perceived by a critic. They are defined by that critic in terms of the most useful rhetorical events, conflicts, or strategies which will best explain the critic's view of the movement."[43] This so-called "widest net" puts the definitional power of a movement solely in the hands of a given critic. However, defining online social movements has been confounded due to the new tactics of activists.

Contemporary activists online utilize tactics for protest untested by historical protestors. Traditional (offline, pre-internet) social movements used public tactics such as demonstrations in order to achieve social change.[44] The goal of these movements was social progress, which was expressed as an appeal to justice.[45] In the twentieth century, social protests were defined by their radicalism, revolution, and counter-culture lifestyles. Confrontation, defined by Robert Cathcart as "that form of human behavior labeled 'agonistics,' i.e. pertaining to ritual conflicts. Confrontation is symbolic display acted out when one is in the throes of agon,"[46] was considered one of the prevailing tactics of protest rhetoric.[47] The public performance aspect of activism was important to cementing

the social movement's validity. Cathcart even argued, "No movement for radical change can be taken seriously without acts of confrontation."[48] Similarly, J.M. Gray claimed that the performance of spectacle was an important aspect of struggle, appropriation, and social activism.[49]

Online activism, unlike offline activism, isn't defined by bodily confrontation, rather online activist takes a more innovative route aided by the affordances of the internet and social media to craft messages and gain attention. Digital feminists have been known to hijack popular hashtags to "shout back" at perceived injustices and take control of a narrative.[50] Others have manufactured community through LISTSERV emails,[51] and more tech-savvy groups have launched Distributed-Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks on targeted websites, which crashes a websites' servers and makes the websites inaccessible.[52] These are just a few examples of protests that are unique to digital activism. Additionally, digital activists have adapted traditional protest tactics to digital spaces, including signing online petitions, writing dissenting opinions in blog posts, and participating in Twitter town halls.[53] More recently, as is the case with #MeToo, the internet has enabled the formation of movements. This is in contrast to early internet movements like Occupy Wall Street. In those cases the internet aided a movement that began offline and worked as a tool or platform for message dissemination and organization. Thus, digital activism and slacktivism have thrown into question what exactly a social movement is, how it acts, and who participates.

An internet campaign, what I will be calling any online group that can be understood as promoting "slacktivism," prioritizes spreading awareness of an issue.[54] The primary goal of a campaign is to inform, and it is through this process of informing that

those promoting the campaign are considered to be performing their activism.[55] These internet campaigns are shorter term and are typically single-issue in their scope. Though these internet campaigns can rely too heavily on the techno-utopian logic that views the expansion of information and the exchange of ideas as the bridge that will enhance political participation, civil society, and democracy,[56] such campaigns have celebrated successes.[57] One clear example of a successful internet campaign is the 2014 summer phenomenon: the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Created by the ALS Association, the challenge asked the world to upend a bucket of ice water over their head on camera, post the short clip to their social media, and then challenge their friends to do the same.[58] Nominated participants had 24 hours to complete the challenge or forfeit by way of a charitable donation to the ALS Association.[59] At the time, the Ice Bucket Challenge was disparaged as a slacktivism,[60] however, the ALS Association tripled their annual funding for research, and contributions have stayed 25% higher than in the year before the challenge.[61] This increase in donations contributed to the funding of Project MinE, which identified a new gene associated with the disease that could lead to new treatment possibilities.[62] What began as an interesting and fun way to stay cool in the summer and simultaneously raise awareness about ALS became an objectively successful internet campaign with real and lasting effects in people's lives. An internet campaign does not need to become a social movement to be successful in its own right, rather, the ALS case exemplifies the difference in goals and outcomes between an internet campaign and a social movement. The critical, and often pejorative, slacktivism evaluation makes a distinction between internet campaigns and movements necessary in order to maintain each group's clear definitional parameters.

For a social movement to be accurately understood in an online environment it must be distinct from campaigns. Social movements as a whole are deeply persuasive unlike internet campaigns. Charles E. Morris, III, defined movements as "by their nature rhetorical. Why? Because…they organize symbols to persuasive ends; they address unsettled issues of public importance; and they seek change not through violence or coercion but through force of argument and appeal."[63] Many internet campaigns can and will be persuasive, as good information usually is, but what makes social movements unique from internet campaigns is that they are much broader in scope and more justice-oriented in goals. Social movements seek change in response to unsettled issues of public importance.

FROM ME TO WE: TIME'S UP LETTER CONSTITUTES A MOVEMENT

How is an online social movement constituted? In the following section I move to answer this question via a close textual analysis of the Time's Up letter. Prior to Time's Up, #MeToo functioned mainly as a digital counterpublic where the individual proclaiming "Me, too" admitted their experience as object acted upon by man. Following Maurice Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric, I demonstrate how participants transformed from objects to subjects. In the case of the *peuple québécois*, Charland asserted that those in Quebec constituted a *peuple* and the White Paper called them forward to perform a certain action.[64] The Time's Up letter does not assert the existence of a certain people, but instead asserts the existence of a certain *pervasive* and *gendered experience*. Unlike the québécois who were "not really Canadian" the women narrativized by Time's Up are not *only* employees but are both employees *and* gendered subjects. This dual position means that an individual is acted upon as both a subordinate

in the workplace and a subordinate within the greater patriarchal culture. *To remake the audience (sisters) from objects to subjects, the Time's Up letters defined a sisterhood that made all women consubstantial based on like-experience. Simultaneously, it hailed a feminist ideology, which provided a common context within which subjects could act. Then, the letters situated the subjects and their motives in a future utopian narrative that provided women a narrative as no longer acted-upon but as actors in their own right.*

Maurice Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric emphasizes the role that narratives and ideologies play in the constitution of collective identities, which will help to elucidate the ways the Time's Up letter cohered the singular #MeToo-s into a collective group capable of persuasive and worldly action.[65] Charland argued that audiences are constituted as subjects through a process of identification with a textual position, which occurs through a series of ideological effects arising from the narrative structure.[66] According to Charland, constitutive rhetoric generates the conditions of possibility that can structure the identity of those to whom it is addressed through the process of interpellation. Interpellation is a process wherein individuals are energized as a political subject by identifying with rhetorical narratives that always already presume the constitution of subject.[67]

The exemplar of interpellation is the case of a police officer shouting (or hailing) on a sidewalk, "Hey, you there!" When the hailed individual turns around, realizing that they were the one being hailed, they become the subject of the ideology of democracy and law.[68] This process happens without succession because ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects. Meaning, individuals are always-already subjects. In his study of the québécois, Charland attended to the way in which narrative functioned as

constitutive rhetoric to provide "continuity across time."[69] This continuity constructed a history for the collective identity. Though the narrative of a constitutive rhetoric tends to be characterized by a teleological movement, narratives of deliberative situations can leave the task of closure to the constituted subjects.

The first open letter published on this issue by the Alianza in *Time Magazine* opened with the salutation "Dear Sisters," which hailed all women. In this instance, sisterhood functioned to connect the women of Hollywood with the farm working women of the Alianza. The Alianza explain this connection, writing: "Even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security."[70] Though the Alianza's letter was openly published in *Time*, the sisterhood they called upon connected their less glamourized industry to the Hollywood elites. A month later, the duplication of the salutation "Dear Sisters" in the Time's Up letter served a two-fold purpose of *calling back to* the Alianza's letter and *calling forth to* every woman in any industry.

Time's Up defined the sisterhood they called on in an essentializing move that constructed the #MeToo audience as women who were assaulted by their male bosses and feel too afraid and disempowered to report the incident of misconduct. Previous advocacy from the #MeToo digital counterpublic for inclusivity based on the gender of the person who experienced sexual misconduct is here reduced to strict female and male gender roles. After first defining who Time's Up *is* ("We write on behalf of over 300 women who work in film, television and theater."[71]), the organization defines the "Sisters" to whom they address. Time's Up wrote,

> To every woman employed in agriculture who has had to fend off unwanted sexual advances from her boss, every housekeeper who has tried to escape an assaultive guest, every janitor trapped nightly in a building with a predatory supervisor, every waitress grabbed by a customer and expected to take it with a smile, and every garment and factory worker forced to trade sexual acts for more shifts, every domestic worker or home health aide forcibly touched by a client, every immigrant woman silenced by the threat of her undocumented status being reported in retaliation for speaking up and to women in every industry who are subjected to indignities and offensive behavior that they are expected to tolerate in worked to make a living: We stand with you. We support you.[72]

Time's Up set up their audience of sisters as woman-acted-upon in the workplace thereby defining access to the sisterhood based on a shared experience of workplace misconduct. Time's Up articulates a common narrative across industries of consistent unequal power dynamics at the detriment of women. In every case they identified, the supervisor has not only professional power, but predatory power over the always-female employee. The experiences of these always-female employees blend together to create a cohesive narrative of fundamental and persistent abuse. This narrative of abuse positions woman as object-acted-upon with no recourse. No ability of fight or flight. Time's Up quickly makes clear that the dynamic is not simply an employer/employee relationship. They state, "Unfortunately, too many centers of power—from legislatures to boardrooms to executive suites and management to academia—lack gender parity and women do not have equal decision-making authority."[73] This statement genders the employer, and

therefore abuser, as always-male; a consequence of a general lack of gender parity in positions of power.

The sisterhood evoked by Time's Up hails feminist readers and made them subjective to a feminist ideology. Sisterhood has been a tenant of feminism for decades. In 1970 Robin Morgan published the anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, which served as both a consciousness-raising analysis and call-to-action for second-wave feminists.[74] Brian Norman, who analyzed *Sisterhood* as a consciousness-raising document, clearly summarized the story of second-wave feminism as that of a movement that fostered women's collectivity by "erasing, deemphasizing, or in some way abnegating difference into sisterhood that inevitably placed white women and their experiences at the center."[75] Norman argued that while the anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful* aspired to engage in anti-racist projects it was only partially successful,[76] as it segregated the Black Women's Liberation Group of Mount Vernon's "Statement on Birth Control to the thematic section of the book.[77] The problem with inclusivity and race-consciousness in the feminist sisterhood may be in tension but are not in opposition. bell hooks wrote in her 1984 book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* about this sisterhood stating, "Some feminists now seem to feel that unity between women is impossible given our differences. Abandoning the idea of Sisterhood as an expression of political solidarity weakens and diminishes feminist movement. Solidarity strengthens resistance struggle."[78] This solidarity in resistance through the feminist sisterhood is the historical and ideological context by and within the subjects act together.

Time's Up's claim of sisterhood further worked to cohere the subjects (women as acted-upon-by-man) into a collective subject. Such a collective subject, according to

Charland, offers an ultimate identification permitting and overcoming or going beyond divisive individual or class interests and concerns. He writes, "This identity transcends the limitations of the individual body and will."[79] Unlike the *québécois*, the women of Time's Up are not constituted under a specific pronoun. Rather, the women-acted-upon are constituted as agents by identification with no singular proper name. Time's Up addresses the letter to "Dear Sisters." This salutation functions merely to support the original essentializing move that underpinned the collective history of the women-as-acted-upon and is never developed as a proper noun for the subjects of the text.

The foregrounded sisterhood functions as the common context through which these women-as-subjects act together. Kenneth Burke writes, "To call a man a friend or a brother is to proclaim him consubstantial with one's self, one's values or purpose."[80] The subject of the Time's Up letter is the sister who has experienced sexual misconduct in the workplace. The farmworker fending off her boss, the janitor trapped in the building with her predatory advisor, the waitress grabbed by the customer; all of these women identify with each other based on the experience of sexual misconduct but at the same time are still distinct in their substances and their individual experiences. The consubstantiated identity of sisterhood papers over the individual differences in the experiences of these distinct women by foregrounding an essentialized feminist resistance effort.

The cohered collective subjects enable, for the first time for #MeToo, agenda-setting and coalition mobilization. The third ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric, Charland argued, is the illusion of freedom. Because they are subjects within a text they must follow the logic of the narrative. Constitutive rhetorics are ideological because they provide individuals with narratives to inhabit as subjects and motives to experience *and*

because they insert narrativized subjects-as-agents into the world.[81] Cohered by the sisterhood, Time's Up closed the letter with a call for specific reforms:

> Therefore, we call for a significant increase of women in positions of leadership and power across industries. In addition, we seek equal representation, opportunities, benefits and pay for all women workers, not to mention greater representation of women of color, immigrant women, disabled women, and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, whose experiences in the workforce are often significantly worse than their white, cisgender, straight peers.

The process of agenda-setting provided some of the first codified goals of the #MeToo movement. This process is important because, as Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer argue, when counterpublics attempt to approach the state or a decision-making body (for nonpolitical public spheres) they often do so in the form of protest groups or social movements.[82] The codification and publication of these actionable goals marks the shift from a digital counterpublic that functioned mainly as an online campaign to a social movement. Furthermore, the agenda-setting re-inscribed the women in the narrative as *actors* no longer only *acted-upon*, but agents capable of change. The women who were once fending off bosses and trapped behind locked doors with predatory men are now "committed to holding our own workplaces accountable, pushing for swift and effective change to make the entertainment industry a safe and equitable place for everyone, and telling women's stories through our eyes and voices with the goal of shifting our society's perception and treatment of women."[83] With a set agenda and a cohesive sisterhood, women are written, and do perform, as agents able to fight back against abuse and fight for equal representation.

CONCLUSIONS

Before the Time's Up open letter, #MeToo functioned as a digital campaign and counterpublic that was set on expressing to the world (non-celebrities, men, employers, those who did not believe women's claims) the magnitude of the problem of sexual misconduct. The goal *was not* to convince women that their experiences with sexual misconduct were problematic, dangerous, or deserving of justice. The objective was always to call-to and amass a large enough collectivity that denial would not be an easy possibility; as Alyssa Milano stated, the goal was to give "people a sense of the magnitude of the problem [of sexual misconduct]."[84] That is to say consciousness raising *was not* the goal of #MeToo—or at least the primary goal. Before Time's Up, to say "#MeToo" was to admit publicly to an experience of sexual misconduct, to be seen as one of many, and to argue for the pervasiveness of the experience. To say #MeToo after the Time's Up letter was to proclaim a solidarity, a resistance, and a fight for the utopian ideal laid out in the letter.

Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric elucidates the ways in which the Time's Up letter functioned to cohere the collective of #MeToo into subjects capable of persuasive action. The letter defined a sisterhood that made all women consubstantial based on like-experiences while simultaneously it hailed a feminist ideology. This ideology provided a common context within which the subjects could act. Then, the letters situated the subjects and their motives in a future utopia, which provided women a narrative as no longer *acted-upon* but as *actors* in their own right. Charland's theory is able to show us how the letter as a text worked to constitute subjects based on a like-experience. What Charland's theory does not account for is how social movements in an

online environment deliberate on the state of the movement, the ideal future, and steps to get there.

To understand this deliberative process, we discussed the importance of digital campaigns, the nuanced differences between social movements and digital campaigns, and the moves that were made in #MeToo to make the (desired) transition from digital campaign to social movement. This self-defining process is an important step that online social movements need to make in order to cohere its participants and motivate them toward common goals. While traditional (offline) social movements may not need to be so explicit in their goals, and may be able to avoid self-definition, the mediated nature of the internet, and the vastness of the participant group, means that extra care must be taken to maintain the definitional nuances of the collective at any given time.

In this moment, the Time's Up letter appears to be a very straight-forward constitution of a movement from a digital campaign. However, as we know the rhetorical situation is *always becoming* and requires, especially in digital counterpublic, constant attention, negotiation, and input. As we will see in the following chapter, the development of #MeToo as a social movement and the essentializing moves made in the Time's Up letter will need to be renegotiated as the question of the sisterhood's identity fosters a crisis for the movement. This is not to pass a judgement claim about the effectiveness or nature of #MeToo as a social movement. Rather, it is to say that a deterministic view enabled by the internet and social media in the context of movement studies can vastly overlook important rhetorical nuances of contemporary social movements.

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CHAPTER 4

DR. VICTIM AND MS. PERPETRATOR: NAVIGATING A CRISIS OF THE MOVEMENT

On October 10, 2017, *New Yorker* reporter Ronan Farrow chronicled Italian filmmaker and actress Asia Argento's experience when, over two decades ago, Hollywood juggernaut film distributor Harvey Weinstein invited her to his hotel room and raped her.[1] The article, which included the experiences of twelve other women raped, assaulted, or otherwise exploited by Weinstein, followed the breaking *New York Times* report that also chronicled multiple women's exploitative experiences with Weinstein.[2] Five days after the *New Yorker* piece, Alyssa Milano tweeted her call to women to say "Me, too," and Argento became one of #MeToo's most vocal supporters and leaders.

In her interview with Farrow from the *New Yorker*, Argento claimed the identity of "victim." Quoting Argento, Farrow wrote, "'The thing with being a victim is I felt responsible,' she said. 'Because, if I were a strong woman, I would have kicked him in the balls and run away. But I didn't. And so I felt responsible.' She described the incident as a 'horrible trauma.'"[3] Argento's recounting of her interactions and subsequent relationship with Weinstein spoke to the complexities of sexual misconduct in the workplace while she simultaneously constructed her identity as victim-of Weinstein. The victim identity Argento constructed invoked a binary Argento-Weinstein victim-perpetrator relationship. This dichotomous relationship was in line with the #MeToo movement's stance on identity and membership. In Chapter 2, we saw how #MeToo set a

boundary that perpetrators were not allowed in the digital counterpublic, and in Chapter 3 we saw how Time's Up constructed an essentialized identity for the movement as women-acted-upon.

The identity that #MeToo crafted as female-victims came to a crisis when, almost a year after the first #MeToo tweet, the *New York Times* published a new report that stated in the months following her public accusation of Weinstein, Argento's partner, celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, arranged a payment of $380,000 to a young actor and musician named Jimmy Bennett (b. 1996).[4] Bennett accused Argento of assaulting him in a California hotel room two months after his 17th birthday.[5] She was 37 years old, and the two met when she played his mother in the 2004 film *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things*.[6] Argento was fired immediately after the news broke from her job on Italy's show X-Factor.[7]

In the same way that Argento positioned herself as the victim of Weinstein's abuse in her *New Yorker* interview, Bennett positioned himself as the victim of Argento's predation. In his first statement after the *New York Times* exposé was released, Bennett stated,

> My trauma resurfaced as she came out as a victim herself. I have not made a public statement in the past days and hours because I was ashamed and afraid to be part of the public narrative…. At the time I believed there was still a stigma to being in the situation as a male in our society. I didn't think that people would understand the event that took place from the eyes of a teenage boy.[8]

Argento initially denied having any sexual contact with Bennett.[9] Later, model Rain Dove, who was dating Rose McGowan, provided the NYPD with text messages from

Argento where she stated "I had sex with [Bennett] it felt weird."[10] Following the release of these text messages, Argento's lawyer released a statement where they called the encounter between Argento and Bennett a "falsely alleged incident" whereupon *she* was victimized by Bennett.[11] Bennett's lawyers responded by claiming that Argento's "mischaracterizations" are "seemingly crafted with the intent to intimidate, shame, and insult [Bennett] back into silence."[12]

As a leader of the #MeToo movement became repositioned as the perpetrator of the same crime for which she claimed to be a victim. This crisis not only confronted Argento with critical questions pertaining to the validity of her victimage, but it also challenged #MeToo's validity and claim to women's rights.

The effort to discredit #MeToo began almost immediately. Harvey Weinstein was one of the first people to speak on the matter. In a statement to *Fox News*, Weinstein's lawyer wrote:

> This development reveals a stunning level of hypocrisy by Asia Argento, one of the most vocal catalysts who sought to destroy Harvey Weinstein. […] The sheer duplicity of her conduct is quite extraordinary and should demonstrate to everyone how poorly the allegations against Mr. Weinstein were actually vetted and accordingly, cause all of us to pause and allow due process to prevail, not condemnation by fundamental dishonesty.[13]

In calling for a "pause to allow due process to prevail" Weinstein and his lawyer called out #MeToo as interfering with the judicial system and condemning (primarily) men to a social/political/professional purgatory based on "fundamental dishonesty." A public feud broke out between Argento and then-friend Rose McGowan. McGowan was the first

woman to accuse Weinstein of rape[14] a full year before the first *New York Times* investigation and was a vocal advocate in the #MeToo movement.[15] The dissolution of McGowan and Argento's friendship, which had been a picturesque example of how common trauma can bond people in solidarity, exemplified a common fear for the future of #MeToo.[16] *The Cut* published a conversation between their president and editor-in-chief Stella Bugbee and senior culture writer Anna Silman that summed up the collective mood of #MeToo immediately after the news of Bennet's accusation.[17] Bugbee states emphatically,

> One of the things I find most interesting is how these allegations trigger a lot of fears in me. It's the same sickening feeling I have when I hear about false rape accusations; they are rare but devastating to all future accusers. I feel like screaming, "THIS DOESN'T MEAN ALL RAPE ACCUSATIONS ARE FAKE!" It makes me simultaneously defensive and despairing. Will people who are anti-#MeToo use this as an attempt to prove it was all just bullshit?[18]

The fears of what "anti-#MeToo" individuals and media would do with the news of the less-than-perfect victim lead many prominent #MeToo leaders to immediately take to their personal twitter accounts and Opinion's sections of newspapers to manage the crisis.

This particular moment in #MeToo's development as a social movement is an insightful case study to understand how a social movement discursively (re)negotiates a crisis of their collective identity as well as a threat to its identity and its political and social progress. Before this moment, #MeToo had set boundaries and declared that they were a movement *for* victims and exactly *not for* perpetrators. Now, #MeToo faced the

fallout when a leader is outed as exactly *not* what #MeToo claims to be—a perpetrator of sexual misconduct.

The inclusion of digital platforms in an activist's toolkit expands the available means of persuasion for social movement leaders and members. Furthermore, cultural shifts in how sexism is talked about in public has changed how feminists can react and address issues of misogyny and gender-based violence. As techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci states, "The future trajectory or potential impacts of networked movements cannot be fully understood by using only conceptual models, indicators and benchmarks."[19] This is not to say that so-called traditional (pre-digital activism) methodologies are no longer useful *nor* that contemporary digital activism is the *only* route forward. Rather, this digital context challenges our understanding of *what* rhetorical devices are best used to address movement crises. *Thus, this chapter aims to explain how an online social movement, #MeToo, manages and redefines itself in the wake of a crisis.*

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will explain how the changes in a feminist agenda and the rise in popularity of digital activism introduced new methodologies, goals, and protest rhetorics. Then, I argue that the 2016 U.S. presidential election led to a shift in exigences that required the inclusion of "traditional" (pre-digital activism) protest rhetorics. I then perform a close-textual analysis of Asia Argento's initial interview with Ronan Farrow in the *New Yorker*, in order to elucidate *how* she was able to discursively construct the identity of the "perfect victim." It is this proclamation of perfect victimization that solidifies Argento as a leading figurehead of the #MeToo movement. The accusation of sexual misconduct *against* Argento problematized not only her as a leader of the movement but also called into question the validity of the #MeToo

movement writ large. Finally, I will perform a close-textual analysis of two responses from fellow #MeToo figureheads. I argue that in order to maintain the legitimacy of the movement, they co-opted the criticisms against Argento into support as proof that the movement has public-wide need. By disassociating the accusation against Argento from her accusation against Weinstein, #MeToo attempted to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and demonstrate how sexual assault is pervasive and complex. Finally, I conclude that this study exposes how an online movement, in moments of crisis, can leverage the crisis to clarify the nuances of the problem central to the movement and renegotiate the boundaries previously set.

Feminism, New Media, And Contemporary Rhetoric

The protest rhetoric of #MeToo and contemporaneous feminism is informed by the changing political and digital landscape. This section will (briefly) summarize the changes in feminism as the Third Wave gave way to the Fourth. The Fourth Wave coincided with young activists taking advantage of social networking sites as a medium for deliberation and protest, which was especially popular with so-called digital feminists. The rhetorical maneuvers of these late-twentieth-early-twenty-first century feminist activists were mostly responses to the covert sexism that was more typical of the time. However, this was challenged once again during Donald J. Trump's presidential run in 2016. This challenge re-popularized the protest rhetoric of the pre-digital era. The merger of traditional and contemporary protest rhetoric that gave way to #MeToo will elucidate the ways in which protest rhetoric continues to develop in the internet age making the line of demarcation between online and offline activism less fixed.

Third Wave feminism was taken up by individuals born after 1960 who, privileged from the legal gains of Second Wave feminist activists, began to focus on a variety of standpoints to recognize the deeper level and breadth of oppression. This included the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and so on.[20] Rebecca Walker introduced the "Third Wave" to the broader public in a 1992 article in *Ms. Magazine* after Anita Hill's testimony the year prior about the sexual harassment she experienced from Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Walker wrote,

> So I write this as a plea to all women, especially women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives.
>
> I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave.[21]

Third Wave feminists challenged the essentialist attitude of the Second Wave that was heavily shaped by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which portrayed the struggle of woman in a very narrow (read: White, educated, middle class) point of view.

Typically, contemporary feminist movement's do not engage in traditional social protest rhetoric. Stacey Sowards and Valerie Renegar argued that so-called "third wave"[22] feminists have chosen a kind of activism that operates in the private sphere or in less public arenas.[23] Instead of making an appeal to justice these feminists are self-oriented and seek self-affirmation, catharsis, and expression.[24] This means that activists tend to *not* be other-directed in their activism, like traditionally theorized. It should be

noted that this ego-centric activism is not new for protest rhetoric. Richard Gregg theorized this ego-function of protest rhetoric in 1971 when he argued that protest rhetoric was attractive to activists because they felt a need for "psychological refurbishing and affirmation" and the protesting helped in constituting selfhood through expression.[25] It is no surprise then, that feminists turned to the internet as the collapsed contexts and blurred public/private dichotomy makes a fitting place for self-oriented activism that seeks self-affirmation, catharsis, and expression (i.e. contemporary feminist protest rhetoric).

The argument for the Fourth Wave of feminism has begun to emerge in scholarship as feminists take advantage of the newly globalized world and ease of connection via the internet and social media. Jennifer Baumgardner argues that the Fourth Wave of feminism emerged approximately in 2008. Setting the scene, she writes,

> By the time Obama and Hillary were facing off in the Democratic primaries, a critical mass of younger feminists began expressing themselves. They were tech-savvy and gender-sophisticated. Their youth was shaped by the 1980s backlash, Take Our Daughters to Work Day initiatives (also known as the Girls' Movement, led by Second Wave women) of the '90s, and 9/11. Perhaps most significant, though, their experience of the online universe was that it was just a part of life, not something that landed in their world like an alien spaceship when they were twenty or fifty.[26]

With the Fourth Wave, feminism opened up discussions about male feminism, transgenderism, and sex work to the world (almost literally) with young activists utilizing social networking sites as a medium for debate, dissemination, and mobilization. It's

clear that building Fourth Wave has much of its basis in the affordances of social media and the internet. Understanding Fourth Wave feminism provides both context for what struggles were/are important to the feminist movement(s) and highlights the importance of the digital sphere of the up and coming Wave. It is from this point that I move away from Fourth Wave feminists, a movement that is still evolving as the wave makes more of itself visible against the horizon, and towards the interrelated field of digital feminism, which staked its ground in the feminist movement at the end of the twentieth century.

One important digital feminist rhetorical maneuver is called "hashtag feminism" or "hashtag activism," which is used to talk about offline experiences online. For example, feminists have co-opted hashtags as a way of shouting-back against sexism. For example, in the summer of 2014, VH1 opened up an AMA (ask me anything) on Twitter for the singer of the controversial song "Blurred Lines," Robin Thicke. To ask Thicke a question, people tweeted with the #AskThicke hashtag. Digital feminists appropriated the tag to raise awareness about the song's dangerous themes about rape and consent.[27] Some of the most popular tweets include, "#askThicke If one of your songs played in the forest and no one was around to hear it would it still be sexist and gross?"[28] and "What form of sexual or emotional abuse will you be normalising in your next jaunty hit? #AskThicke."[29] Digital platforms allow feminists to reach more individuals beyond their locality[30] and they help facilitate an open engagement with and promotion of feminism.[31]

Digital platforms are not only positive places for activists. Emma Turley and Jenny Fisher note that women are frequently attacked online by trolls and often receive rape and death threats.[32] Furthermore, critics of social media activism also question the possibility of the mob-mentality, stating that the "mobilizing power social media creates

also enables mobbing, bullying and harassment."[33] Similarly, critics of #MeToo view the accusatory tweets as the metaphorical sharpening of pitchforks while simultaneously acting as judge, jury, and executioner.[34] The effects of online activism on offline activity can be both positive and negative. For instance, in the 2012 Steubenville rape case, social media was used to pursue and provide evidence to prosecute the perpetrator(s), *but* it was also used to harass and shame the teenage girl who was raped.[35] Digital feminist activism has not only led to positive and negative offline effects, it has also also contributed to a shift in protest rhetoric.

Protest rhetoric of traditional activists responded to the need for social or political change with public protest. For traditional activists, the exigency was a need for social change or progress and was the primary function of social movements.[36] The goal of such social movements was social progress, which was often expressed as an appeal to justice.[37] These traditional social movements took the form of public protests such as sit-ins, rallies, and traffic obstructions. Confrontation was the prevailing methodology of public protest rhetoric.[38] Scholars defined social protest in the realm of radicalism, revolution, counter-culture lifestyles, and obscenities.[39] J.M. Gray argued that the performance of the spectacle was an important aspect of struggle, appropriation, and social activism.[40] Even scholars who took the anti-conflict stance agreed that a goal of social progress was central to social movements.[41]

The overt sexism marked by President Donald J. Trump's campaign and election caused another shift in the methods contemporary feminists used. In the wake of the Trump election, covert sexism no longer appeared to be the spoils of second wave feminism's war. This shift is exemplified in one simple instance of overt sexism brought

to light during the 2016 election. In the now infamous 2005 Access Hollywood tape, presidential hopeful Donald Trump proclaimed, "You know I'm automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy."[42] The Trump presidential campaign, and all the locker-room talk that came with it, served as the archetypal villain for feminists experiencing overt sexism in their everyday lives. Ashwini Tambe, an associate professor of women's studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, in a podcast with NPR's *Hidden Brain*, attempted to answer the question, "Why now?" To explain why the #MeToo movement gained so much traction in the media and public, and why it has continued to grow, Tambe based her opinion on Frantz Fanon's theory of horizontal violence. Fanon's theory describes how people living under brutal colonial rule dealt with oppression. Tambe states,

> Because it's so difficult to attack or target colonial rulers, what Fanon found was that people were lashing out against people in their own lives…I think that the election of Donald Trump has served as trigger, and it has provoked a great deal of fury and impatience because he represents, for many people, the ultimate unpunished predator.[43]

As overt sexism became common in the media, and continued to go unpunished, feminists responded with traditional protest rhetoric methods, namely marches and rallies. The 2017 Women's March, which protested the U.S. presidential election of Donald Trump, began with a single Facebook post the day after President Trump was elected and over the course of two months it mobilized millions of women and men around the world to march in protest on President Trump's inauguration.[44] This blending

of traditional and contemporary—offline and online—protest rhetoric exemplifies the continued development of protest rhetoric in the internet age when a clear demarcation between online and offline activism cannot be clearly made.

(Im)Perfect Victims and Co-Opting Arguments

In the following section I will explain the important role victim rhetoric plays in how women are perceived as legitimate victims of serious crimes. I will then explain how Asia Argento constructed her own victim rhetoric in order to solidify herself as a legitimate #MeToo figurehead. This explanation sets up a discussion of the rhetorical complexities of rhetorics of sexual misconduct and of social movement leadership.

The identity label of "victim" has many contemporary entailments (both positive and negative), but the *right to be a victim* has an important legal and rhetorical history. The history of rape laws demonstrates not only how the crime is defined but also how the victim of such a crime is positioned. Early written laws and texts, namely the Code of Hammurabi (1754 B.C.), defined rape as a property crime where the male head of the household was positioned as the victim.[45] In the 11th and 12th centuries rape began to be considered a violent sexual crime against the individual who experienced the assault.[46] American colonies defined rape as the common-law: "carnal knowledge of a woman 10 year or older, forcibly and against her will."[47] In the 1800s, temperance and suffrage activists lobbied to raise the age of consent to between 14 and 18 depending on the state. Women of color, specifically Black women (free or enslaved) were (depending on the state) excluded from rape laws until 1861, six years after slavery was abolished.[48] It wasn't until 1993 when marital rape was illegal in all 50 states.[49]

In lieu of legal rights, second wave feminists rhetorically negotiated their identity as victims by speaking of themselves as victims of a crime. In 1971, the New York Radical Feminists organized the first public speak-out about rape at St. Clement's Church in New York City. At this speak-out, women demanded that rape be recognized not as the result of a man overcome by his sex drive but as a weapon that men used against women.[50] Later, in 1975, Susan Brownmiller's pivotal book *Against Our Will—Men, Women and Rape*, argued, among many things, that rape was an act of degradation inextricably linked to the use of power in human affairs.[51] In a thematic analysis of women's identities surrounding gendered violence, Nina Reich stated that the rhetoric of victims has given women's groups access to funds and legislation, and raised public awareness of violence against women.[52] The rhetoric of victims has helped many women who experience gender based violence achieve material and legal rights, but *how* individuals negotiate their victim identities will illuminate the social and political entailments of such rhetoric.

The question of agency is tied up in the construction of the victim identity. Sharon Lamb writes on the problem of agency in victim/survivor discourse;[53] if an individual is viewed as a "victim," she argued, then there might be times when they are just reacting, but they are normally viewed as helpless. However, if we view the same individual as a "survivor" then everything they do is viewed as active and assertive.[54] The appeal to the "survivor" label reads as an agentic desire: where *victims* seemingly lack agency, *survivors* have an abundance. Furthermore, anger often complicates and overwrites a woman's agency in response to rape. For instance, Lamb writes of a woman named Lorena Bobbitt who cut off her husband's penis in a rage but, because she was

categorized as a battered woman (hence, a victim), the public understood her as "not right in the head," and believed that this was her only choice to escape her abusive husband.[55] The act may have been her only way to escape her husband, but Bobbitt might have also been angry and acted accordingly.[56] With their agency always in flux, how, then, can victims see themselves as "planful actors" as they describe their victimization? Amanda Konradi found that women who prepared to face their accusers in court researched and performed the role of victim in order to influence the prosecution process.[57] The performance of such prepared behaviors, Konradi argues, is the individual's exhibition of personal agency. Put simply, the construction of an individual's public victim narrative is a method of exhibiting agency while adopting an identity that implies a lack of agency.

Argento constructs her victimhood fully, with the help of Farrow, in her first interview in the *New Yorker* where she claims to suffer from abuse related symptoms. The pathologizing and symptomatology of the victim means that the victim must develop abuse related symptoms.[58] Such a view of the victim stems from the belief that the most effective way to make the public recognize the problem of sexual abuse was to prove that abuse inevitably and overwhelming led to psychological distress.[59] In her interview with Farrow, Argento clearly notes her own "eternal suffering" from the rape that occurred two decades before. Farrow writes, "She described the incident as a 'horrible trauma.' Decades later, she said, oral sex is still ruined for her. 'I've been damaged,' she told me. 'Just talking to you about it, my whole body is shaking.'"[60] Twenty years later, Argento still suffers physical reactions from simply recalling psychological stress of the event and has trouble engaging in pleasurable sex. She has been damaged, she says, and therefore

she will never be the same. This visceral physical reaction Argento claims to still suffer from is proof that her trauma invades her body without her control to this day.

Not only is Argento eternally suffering from the abuse, but she is continually reacting to it. A victim is seen as continually reacting to their abuse "as if no other life circumstances could compare with this trauma for influencing the course of events in their lives as they continue."[61] In Farrow's article, Argento was conveyed as continuously-reacting to her trauma; exemplified in the a movie she starred in, wrote, and directed in 2000. In the film, a scene portrays a heavyset producer cornering Argento's character in a hotel room, he asks for a massage, and attempts to assault her. This story mirrors Argento's experience with Weinstein. Farrow writes about the movie stating, "The movie's most significant departure from the real-life incident, Argento told me, was how the hotel-room scene ended. 'In the movie I wrote,' she said, 'I ran away.'"[62] For both Farrow and Argento, the writing and production of this movie was not simply a piece of creative fiction (not even creative fiction based in reality), rather it is a rewriting, re-living, and reaction of her own experience in that hotel room where Argento faced Weinstein. Even Argento's #MeToo activism is contributed wholly to this experience rather than, for instance, a moral belief that sexual assault should be talked about, understood, and reduced. Since the rape, all of Argento's actions can be, and will be, traced back to the trauma of that night, the eternal suffering it has caused, and the continual harkening back to those pivotal moments.

Lastly, Argento is perceived of as the ideal looking victim: attractive, innocent, and young. The inclusion of the criterion "and from the middle class" is common for the victim to be perceived as convincing. However, for a film actress who had, at the time of

the assault, twice won the Italian equivalent of an Oscar, this socioeconomic classifier does not fit Argento. The label of "rich" and "white" frequently, in the popular intersectional feminist lens, works against legitimizing Argento's story and activism. However, largely, this factor has not hung over her work as much as other women in the movement, for instance Alyssa Milano. It may be the case that Asia Argento's exotic sounding name (pronounced AH-zee-ah) and foreign-born identity have made her just "other" enough to not be considered by mainstream commentators as "white" or "privileged." Nonetheless, without ever seeing a picture of Argento, the reader knows she is attractive. Farrow's first sentence says, "Asia Argento, who was born in Rome, played the role of a glamorous thief named Beatrice in the crime drama 'B. Monkey,' which was released in the U.S. in 1999."[63] From a single sentence Argento is written as a glamorous Italian foreign film star. Born in the romanticized city of Rome, Argento speaks to Americans with a thick accent, she stars in crime dramas as the *attractive* thief, and is surely adorned with sparkling jewels. Furthermore, Argento, in narrating her experience, positions herself as both innocent and young. Argento declares, "Just his body, his presence, his face, bring me back to the *little girl* that I was when I was twenty-one. When I see him it makes me feel *little* and *stupid* and *weak*."[64] At twenty-one years old, Argento has surpassed all American markers of female adulthood: puberty, menstruation, the right to vote, the ability to gamble and buy cigarettes and alcohol. She is not, and was not, by any criteria the "little girl" she positions herself to be at the moment. At twenty-one, Argento viewed herself as a little girl because she *felt* "stupid and weak," rather than feeling like a "strong woman" who would have "kicked him in the balls and run away."[65] By not being a "strong woman," by not running away, by not "kicking in him the balls,"

Argento situated herself as an innocent, young girl not responsible for the assault and therefore made for an ideal, media-friendly "victim" deserving of the voice to tell her story.

The initial construction of Argento's victim identity was taken up and reproduced by the news media even when her ability to claim the victim identity was called into question. In less than 1,200 words, Farrow and Argento co-constructed the ideal victim identity that served as the basis for all of Argento's work within the #MeToo movement. In a conversation at *The Cut* about the news of Bennett's accusation against Argento, senior culture writer Anna Silman spoke about Argento's perfect victim-ness stating, "I think for a lot of feminists and outspoken #MeToo supporters, Asia Argento is "our" girl. We have a vested interest in her narrative."[66] Unlike her then-friend, and fellow Harvey Weinstein accuser, Rose McGowan, Argento is never portrayed as angry, irrational, or over-emotive. She is strong and stoic, and *appropriately* emotional only when talking about her abuse. Her anger is restrained; she never shrieks, yells, or cusses wildly. Even visually, Argento wears dark colors and frequently long sleeves that cover her radically appearing tattoos. Her hair is

Figure 6 Asia Argento (left) and Rose McGowan (right) pictured together before their falling out. Credit: IPA/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

femininely styled: shoulder length, freshly colored, and always perfectly curled. In articles detailing the accusation brought against her by Jimmy Bennett, news outlets chose flattering cover photos of Argento facing the camera looking resilient but not angry, sometimes she's even laughing or outright smiling.

Fine Line Between Victim and Perpetrator

In the *New York Times* article, written by Kim Severson that details Bennett's abuse allegation against Argento, he too is positioned as the perfect victim in the same way as Argento. He suffers from abuse related symptoms. Severson writes, in accordance with Bennett's lawyer, "The fallout from 'a sexual battery' was so traumatic that it hindered Mr. Bennett's work and income and threated his mental health."[67] He is eternally suffering. Bennett notes that after meeting Argento his income dropped from $2.7 million over five years to an average of $60,000 a year, "which he attributes to the trauma that followed the sexual encounter with Ms. Argento."[68] He is young and innocent. Bennett is pictured in the article opposite Argento in their 2004 film: him looking incredibly young, sad, and confused staring at his on-screen mother, Argento, with platinum blonde hair, red lips grasping a lit cigarette, and an ear full of piercings. Bennett is described as being "only two months past his 17th birthday" when the abuse occurred.[69] For extra emphasis, the encounter is positioned as having ruined what was sure to be a successful and flourishing acting career. The article notes, "But for Mr. Bennett, who as a child actor charmed Harrison Ford and Bruce Willis and earned the nickname Jimmy Two-Takes because he rarely flubbed his lines, the 2013 hotel-room encounter was a betrayal that precipitated a spiral of emotional problems."[70] The

publication of this article, wherein Bennett is clearly just as much a victim as Argento also claimed to be confuses the lines of victim and perpetrator.

VICTIM *AND* PERPETRATOR: A CRISIS

Argento cannot be both a perfect victim and a perpetrator as they are conflicting identities. So when Argento is no longer the perfect victim, when she is accused of also being a perpetrator of sexual misconduct, how are we to understand those who claim #MeToo? If the most perfect realization of a victim existed, it was performed by Argento. However, when Argento breaks that idealization, what does that mean not only for her ability to lead the #MeToo movement, but also for the rest of the less-than-perfect "victims" who proclaim #MeToo? To maintain the legitimacy of the #MeToo movement, other figureheads co-opted the criticisms against Argento into support that proved women who experience sexual assault are held to an impossible standard in order to be deemed publicly believable. By disassociating the accusation against Argento from her accusation against Weinstein, #MeToo attempted to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and demonstrate how sexual assault is pervasive and complex. In the following section I will analyze two fellow #MeToo figureheads' response to the Argento crisis to argue that a two-step process took place. First, fellow leaders co-opted the moment of accusation against Argento into further support for the #MeToo movement's effectiveness. Then, leaders made Argento's accusation against Weinstein distinct from, but co-existing with, her alleged abuse of Bennett.

After the accusation against Argento was published, the original "Me, Too"[71] founder Tarana Burke co-opted the individual case and used it as proof that the #MeToo

movement writ large was effective. In a Twitter thread, Burke quickly responded to the news of Bennett's accusation, tweeting,

> People will use these recent news stories to try and discredit this movement - don't let that happen. This is what Movement [sic] is about. It's not a spectator sport. It is people generated. We get to say "this is/isn't what this movement is about!"[72]

According to Burke, the #MeToo movement is *exactly* about this moment. This moment is not about perfect survivors or easy problems with easy solutions, it is messy and complex. To say that an individual coming forward to share their experience with sexual assault is *not* what #MeToo is about because of who the perpetrator is would be a hypocritical to the entire movement. The speed at which Burke was able to respond to the breaking news is an important affordance of social media; it provides Burke, or anyone, the ability to quickly renegotiate the threat of crisis might pose to a movement's identity goals. For Burke, this moment isn't a crisis, it is similar to the other moments that have helped to build #MeToo. Burke goes on to write about how this moment is necessary for the advancement of the movement as a whole. She tweets,

> A shift can happen. This movement is making space for possibility. But, it can only happen after we crack open the whole can of worms and get really comfortable with the uncomfortable reality that there is no one way to be a perpetrator.[73]

Yes, Burke argues, Argento is (allegedly) a perpetrator of sexual assault. However, that fact alone does not bring down, impair, or derail the movement as a whole. Quite the opposite actually, this moment is proof that the movement is working and encouraging

more diverse individuals to feel safe enough to speak out. Regardless of who is the perpetrator in their story.

After leveraging this moment as support for the effectiveness of #MeToo, Burke and others distinguished Argento's accusation against Weinstein from her alleged abuse of Bennett. For the movement, this was a necessary step to demonstrate why complexity in the ways we understand individuals as a victims/survivors and perpetrators is crucial to the movement's progress. In her Twitter thread Burke says, "there is no one way to be a perpetrator"[74] and "there is no model survivor."[75] If there was a perfect victim, it would have been Argento. But the moment when her perfection is thrown into question, she serves as greater evidence for how society silences those who experience sexual misconduct. Without perfection, there is no public buy-in, and without public buy-in, whether it be a jury or a kangaroo court, there is no believing, understanding, or drive for justice. An opinion piece in the *Boston Globe* by Renée Graham builds on Burke's argument. She writes,

> …our society has bought into the myth of the perfect victim. We expect victims to be pristine and unblemished. Yet perfection should not be a prerequisite to being believed as a victim. None of this is to undermine Bennett's #MeToo moment. There is no reason to doubt his story.[76]

By throwing out the myth of perfection we can understand two distinct statements: Asia Argento is a victim. Jimmy Bennett is a victim. These are not contradictory because experiences do not exist in a vacuum. Thus, for Burke and fellow leaders of #MeToo, this moment is further proof of the messy nature of abuse and victimization.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have explored a moment when #MeToo faced a crisis that called into question its identity and goals. This particular moment in #MeToo's development as a social movement was an insightful case study to understand how a social movement discursively (re)negotiates a crisis of their collective identity. It has allowed me to theorize about how online to offline movements can address definitional crises of membership (must be a victim) and leadership (what if a leader is also a perpetrator?).

First, women who experience sexual assault are held to an impossible standard in order to be deemed publicly believable. In order to maintain the legitimacy of #MeToo as a movement, other figureheads co-opted the criticisms against Argento to demonstrate that #MeToo was effective. They argue that #MeToo values all victims, even those who risk negating their victimization when they act as perpetrators. Second, by constructing the accusation against Argento as distinct from her accusation against Weinstein, #MeToo aimed to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and demonstrate how sexual assault is pervasive and complex.

This chapter also speaks to the rhetorical strategies available for movements rooted in digital feminism and Fourth Wave feminism. The internet allows for marginalized groups to speak publicly on issues that affect them while maintaining a level of privacy and thus safety. For social movements, the affordances of the internet stretch beyond its mediated nature. Taking on immediate and urgent problems can be resolved first with a Twitter thread to assuage public sentiment and second through a nuanced essay on an online news publication. The internet has created a place for the quick publication of information, and social media sites, despite their drawbacks, create a

place for the public to interact in a real time with said information. The ability the move between platforms—from social networking sites to long-form essays and eventually to speeches given at rallies and back around again—allow for reactions to be crafted and published with different time constraints in mind. This quick reaction time, while probably contributing to the dizzying speed of the current news cycle, also helps maintain a social movement when it is faced with a serious crisis.

Following the immediate fall-out of Bennett's accusation and the feud with McGowan, Argento announced a campaign that she called "Phase Two" of #MeToo. In the statement released by her lawyer, Argento is positioned as "one of the pioneers of Phase One of the #metoo movement."[77] The statement goes on to call upon "victims" who have some negative history "to come forward and say "me too, I was a victim of sexual assault" and "whatever might color my past does not negate the truth of what happened to me."[78] The statement calls the allegations against Argento "gray areas" of her past that "thereby [besmirch] [her] reputation."[79] This so-called "Phase Two" of #MeToo spearheaded by Argento was not warmly welcomed. *The Atlantic* called "Phase Two" "counterproductive" and "redundant" writing that "Argento's statement about 'Phase Two' attempts to stake out her ongoing prominence in the movement. In doing so, it worsens the problem of over-centering celebrities all along."[80] Many individuals during this time pointed to a tweet from Tarana Burke earlier in the year when she stated, "But watch carefully who are called "leaders" of the movement."[81] Argento deleted her Twitter account sometime after the Bennett accusations were made public,[82] and she has not made any public appearances on behalf of the movement since her launch of "Phase Two."

The crisis of the #MeToo movement has only damage Argento's ethos as a capable leader as evidenced by her lack of involvement and the deluge of criticism about her so-called "Phase Two." As a movement, #MeToo's ethos remained intact as participants and feminists continue to leverage its virality for social and political progress. After the dissolution of Argento's leadership, the movement itself began to focus less on individual leaders and instead focused on the work of the movement as a whole.

While Burke and Milano are still considered pioneers and figureheads of the movement, the majority of #MeToo's work has shifted to more behind the scenes work. #MeToo launched multiple initiatives to seek progressive legislation and social wellness. #MeToo (through Time's Up) has launched the campaign "The 4% Challenge," which asks actors to commit to announcing a project with a female director on a feature film in the next 18 months,[83] and the podcast "Noisemakers," which brings diverse women together to examine the impact of harassment, gender inequality, and pay inequity in the workplace.[84] They have also partnered with over 15 advocacy groups and organizations including Tarana Burke's "Me Too Mvmt."[85]Furthermore, Time's Up has launched two additional organizations. First, Time's Up/Advertising, whose mission is to "drive new policies, practices, decisions and tangible actions that result in more balanced, diverse and accountable leadership; address workplace discrimination, harassment and abuse; and create equitable and safe cultures within our agencies."[86] Second, Time's Up Healthcare, which focuses on "supporting all those who are vulnerable to bias, harassment, and discrimination, whether due to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, country of origin, disability, or any other factor" in the healthcare industry.[87]

The public still views #MeToo as the movement creating social and political change in regard to gender-based violence. When U.S. southern states began passing strict abortion laws in the summer of 2019, it was the Hollywood core of #MeToo, specifically Alyssa Milano, that mobilized to advocate against these laws; many of whom decided to boycott filming in states (specifically, Georgia) who passed such stringent laws.[88] Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg publicly supported the #MeToo movement ahead of the controversial Brett Kavanaugh Senate hearing.[89] She said:

> I am really turned on by this 'Me, too' because these #MeToo complaints, every woman of my vintage has not just one story but many stories, but we thought there's nothing you can do about it, boys will be boys, so just find a way to get out of it…. The more women that are out there doing things, the more women will be encouraged to do things, and we will all be better off for it, men, women and children.[90]

And men and women have, seemingly, been the better for it. In July of 2019, the dating site Match.com released their annual report on singles where they found that 51% of men say the #MeToo movement has caused them to act differently overall.[91] Nearly 60% of these singles say that the #MeToo movement is important to them (46% men, 69% women), and only 14% singles think the #MeToo movement has made dating more challenging.[92] The Harvard Business Review also conducted two studies one before #MeToo in 2016, and one after in 2018.[93] They examined women's feelings of self-esteem and self-doubt, and found an increase in self-esteem and a decrease in self-doubt since 2016.[94] They write, "More important, the relationship between unwanted sexual attention and both of these outcomes (lower self-esteem, higher self-doubt) was weaker

in 2018."[95] The important impacts the #MeToo movement had in the workplace and everyday life cannot be overstated.

Sexual misconduct and assault are complex, nuanced, and stigmatized issues. It has been historically contentious and continues to be a difficult conversation to navigate. However, the first year of the #MeToo movement laid out for the public all the complexities and nuances of such an emotionally and legally enmeshed issue. There was no perfection or simplicity for the movement. Each conversation was had, had again, tweaked, changed, and eventually settled. Until it was brought back up to bring about more nuanced understandings. #MeToo has entered the public vocabulary and continues to serve as shorthand to talk about questions of gender equality, sexual misconduct, and the changing appropriateness of traditional rules and mores. It may not have been an ideal turn of events, but the outcomes were productive for a more equal and safe society (and workplace).

ENDNOTES

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https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/harvey-weinstein-team-responds-to-asia-argento-allegations-this-reveals-a-stunning-level-of-hypocrisy.

[14] Rose McGowan, "Because My Ex Sold Our Movie to My Rapist for Distribution #WhyWomenDontReport," Tweet, @*rosemcgowan* (blog), October 13, 2016, https://twitter.com/rosemcgowan/status/786723576275664896.

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sea." See, Jennifer Baumgardner, "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?" in *F'em: Goo Goo, Gaga and Some Thoughts on Balls* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2011).

[23] Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar, "Reconceptualizing Rhetorical Activism in Contemporary Feminist Contexts." *Howard Journal of Communication,* 17, no. 1 (2007), 60.

[24] Ibid., 67.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

On October 15, 2017 the #MeToo digital campaign went viral. Inspired by a tweet from actor and activist Alyssa Milano, individuals who had experienced sexual harassment or assault responded to Milano with the hashtag #MeToo. The goal was simple: to spread awareness about the pervasive problem of gender-based violence present in contemporary society. As the hashtag gained popularity across the world, #MeToo began to be used to describe all types of gender-based violence—not only the most extreme cases of aggression.

Three months later, on January 1, 2018, leaders of #MeToo (mainly Hollywood celebrities) formed the Time's Up organization, which provides financial and legal support to clients who face discrimination; campaigns and initiatives are used to fight for gender parity across industries. This moment marked the shift from #MeToo as a digital campaign to #MeToo as a social movement. Through an open letter published that launched the organization, Time's Up was able to cohere the "magnitude" of the campaign and motivate this magnitude toward common goals and agenda-setting.

Before Time's Up's formation, to say "#MeToo" was to admit publicly to an experience of sexual misconduct, to be seen as one of many, and to argue for the pervasiveness of the experience. To say #MeToo after the Time's Up letter was to proclaim a solidarity, a resistance, and a fight for the utopian ideal laid out in the letter. However, the story of #MeToo (and Time's Up) is not one of perfect linearity. As we saw

in chapter four, in August of 2018, almost a full year after the first #MeToo tweet, the movement faced a crisis when one of its most vocal leaders, Asia Argento, was accused of sexual assault by then-17-year-old actor and musician Jimmy Bennett. The fear that this crisis would be the end of #MeToo rumbled through the ether but was quickly assuaged by fellow #MeToo leaders.

For social movements that emerge online and sustain their presence primarily through digital media, using "traditional" pre-internet rhetorical strategies may not always be possible. Social networking content is shaped by the medium of the social networking site, which itself creates meaning for groups in order to form collective identities. The mediated and asynchronous features of social networking sites provide a seemingly safe place for historically marginalized groups to express their discontent with the current "evil and erroneous system"[1] as Cathcart put it. However, it also means that rhetorical scholars had to rethink the strategies used by activists in this online environment.

Each chapter has highlighted a flashpoint, a moment, when #MeToo engaged traditional and internet age strategies. The merging of traditional and contemporary protest rhetoric that provoked #MeToo elucidated the ways in which protest rhetoric continues to develop in the internet age. This has made the line of demarcation between online and offline activism less stringent. As these chapters have demonstrated, online and offline movement-making can include tweeting, creating a hashtag, publishing open letters in prominent newspapers, sharing the letters on social media, addressing hashtags on talk shows, sharing clips of the talk shows on social media, and so on. The merging, or mixed bag, of strategies that I have highlighted over the course of these chapters have

enabled #MeToo to build identity through boundary marking, cohering a movement with the use of constitutive rhetoric, and manage crises and renegotiate identity.

In chapter two, I discussed the rhetorical maneuvers a digital campaign can use in order to begin to build a collective identity. I argued that #MeToo's participants created the movement's identity discursively through threads of confrontation. These threads of confrontation begin with the process of networked gatekeeping wherein elites are crowdsourced to prominence through engagement. Once crowdsourcing (s)elects an individual, and by proxy the topic they posted about, a deliberation period occurs amongst the digital counterpublic. This deliberation period is eventually put to an end by a declaration of consensus. While it may seem like a strictly linear process in this case, other threads, and even the future of this thread, may not always unfurl as such. As new information comes to be, threads can be raised once again and deliberated upon more. The process of crowdsourcing elites—a typical method of (s)electing leadership in a digital landscape—consequently modifies ethos in a digital counterpublic to include the quantitative magnitude of an individual's impact (reach). In this process, we see a blend of rhetorical strategies: an established strategy of building ethos called "ethos as interruption-interrupting" and a new method of building threads of confrontation in order to string together a deliberative conversation *within* a diverse digital counterpublic and *throughout* a disparate online environment. By utilizing a "more traditional" rhetorical maneuver of ethos as interruption-interrupting, #MeToo was able to effectively crowd-source elites, but do so in a way that was useful online.

In chapter three, we discussed the rhetorical maneuvers made in the Time's Up letter that served the dual function of cohering the "magnitude" and constituting #MeToo

as a social movement. The goal *was not* to convince women that their experiences with sexual misconduct were problematic, dangerous, or deserving of justice. The objective was to call-to and amass a large enough collectivity that denial would not be an easy possibility. As Alyssa Milano stated, the goal was to give "people a sense of the magnitude of the problem [of sexual misconduct]."[2] This self-defining process is an important step for online social movements in order to cohere the participants and motivate them toward common goals. While traditional (offline) social movements may not need to be so explicit in their goals, and may be able to avoid self-definition, the mediated nature of the internet, and the vastness of the participant group, means that extra care must be taken to maintain the definitional nuances of the collective at any given time. The important nuances, details, and the high stakes needed to get the Time's Up launch *right* led the organization to revert to a more "traditional" route for their activism. #MeToo transitioned to long-form letters and ads in printed newspapers in order to relay more nuanced explanations and justifications for their decisions. The constitutive rhetoric of the open letter that cohered the "sisterhood" followed many of the same paths as the White Paper from Maurice Charland's article. This is all to say, in this very important moment when #MeToo transitioned from a digital counterpublic to a social movement, the rhetorical maneuvers of pre-internet time grounded the movement in the history of activism.

In chapter four, we saw how the movement addressed the ongoing need to negotiate and renegotiate boundaries of a movement. This chapter also speaks to the rhetorical strategies available for movements rooted in digital feminism and Fourth Wave feminism. The internet allows marginalized groups to speak publicly on issues that affect

them, while maintaining a level of privacy, and thus safety. In this moment, as needed, the movement shifts between internet platforms; from social networking sites to long-form essays and eventually to speeches given at rallies and back around again. The near constant ability to pivot to the media that would provide the best outcome—may it be speed, length, or nuance—enabled responses to be crafted and published with different time constraints in mind. This quick reaction time, while probably contributing to the dizzying speed of the current news cycle, also helps maintain a social movement when it is faced with a serious crisis.

Today—that is the summer of 2019—#MeToo (through Time's Up) continues to advocate for important change in legislation, workplace practices, and every day social interaction. Everyday news articles (in print and online) reference #MeToo. For example, on August 10, 2019, there are *eleven* Google News pages worth of results for "#MeToo." In an interview with *USA Today*, Geena Davis recalls an uncomfortable audition stating, "So hopefully in the time of #MeToo and Time's Up, women aren't going to have to suffer through [not knowing how to say "no"]. It's pretty standard that you don't meet alone with a man in a private room or hotel suite anymore, but plenty of that stuff goes on and has gone on for a long time."[3] The *Associated Press* writes "[Bill] Cosby appeal tests other accusers' testimony in #MeToo era."[4] On this day, many results centered around the alleged suicide at the Metropolitan Correctional Center of Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender who got a sweetheart plea deal in 2008.[5] Epstein was being held at the MCC on charges for the sex trafficking of minors in Florida and New York.[6] The *Associated Press* reported on a statement from Epstein's lawyer whereupon he stated that Epstein had the "misfortune to be a wealthy man in the #metoo era."[7] Clearly, even two years into

the movement, #MeToo continues to impact the lives of the accused and the women who typically felt disempowered in workplaces.

The #MeToo movement will likely be written into (feminist) rhetorical history and U.S. history, but not just as a movement that shaped rape culture. The impact of #MeToo tells the story of the changing way we do politics: the speed at which issues arise and are settled (then come back up again), the emotional impact of every issue, and the sheer volume, metaphorically and literally, of people who can weigh in on any given topic. For activists in general, both Fourth Wave feminists and advocates for other matters, I see the main lesson of #MeToo as one of working quickly and leveraging organic moments of virality. #MeToo has excelled at taking a moment and transforming it into progress. In moments of controversy (Franco and Argento) #MeToo was able to act quickly, address concerns, and create a teachable lesson. In lulls, #MeToo announced action-based initiatives to rejuvenate the base (Time's Up). #MeToo is a story of *no longer waiting*, of *everybody acting*. "What do activists need to do in a post-Trump internet era?" one may ask. Leverage, capitalize, and co-opt every hypocrisy, every moment, and every criticism in order to bring nuance and progress.

ENDNOTES

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And I try, oh my god, do I try

I try all the time, in this institution

And I pray, oh my god, do I pray

I pray every single day

For a revolution

What's Up? – 4 Non Blondes